

Standard Disclaimer:

Bob looked up and noted the readers had finally arrived, filling the theater. "Show time," he muttered to himself, then he quickly checked his outfit to make sure he was presentable.

His tux was flawless, his hair impeccable, and for once, his glasses were even clean!

He smiled, spotting Alyx in the front row looking supportive at this inauguration of a new story. She knew this disclaimer was special, this disclaimer was serious business.

Bob walked to the edge of the stage and smiled at the readers. "When we first started this story we were struck by what we thought was a wonderful idea. Neither of us had a clue that in the middle of writing this we would lose the person that first gave us these ideas."

"We humbly dedicate this story to Anne McCaffrey. She's gone between, but her legacy remains. She gave us a world of dragons, and now we give you a modified version of her dragons and Harry Potter."

"Finally we don't own Harry Potter or the Potter Universe, that stuff belongs to the surviving family of JKR who we know died before books 6 and 7 could be written, how else can you explain them being so terrible?"

Bob turned and walked off the stage. As he did it became apparent that someone had removed the back of his pants. It also became apparent that his butt cheeks were unnaturally hairy.

Alyx cheered and whistled from her seat in the audience, but she also knew Bob was seconds from finding out. So she activated her escape plan. Built into her seat were powerful rocket motors which she now fired. The chair lifted off at great speed and crashed into the ceiling.

From behind the curtain Bob smiled. He knew about her escape plan and had placed a plate steel over the hole she had made in the ceiling. "Enjoy the chapter folks," he muttered. "I'm going to go change, for some reason this tux is chilly."

Dragons are a class five beast who provide the wizarding community with considerable resources. It is our responsibility to preserve and protect these creatures so that we will always have them available for our needs. Dragons are excellent sources of enchanted leather, potion ingredients and heart strings for wands.

Excerpt from *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find them* by Newt Scamander. Published 1927.

Hogwarts Quidditch Pitch, November 15th...

Harry sat in the tent listening to the roar of the crowd and couldn't help tremble a bit in fear.

"What am I doing here?" he whispered to himself. "I should have refused. Being without magic is better than being dead."

He recalled the Dursleys, then reconsidered his statement. Maybe being dead was better than the Dursleys. With no magic at all he'd have no protection from them. Without magic, he'd be expelled from this world and the Dursleys would have no reason to worry about what Wizards would think of how they treated him.

Life at school had become a living hell for him once his name had come out of that damned cup. Hermione was the only close friend who still spoke to him, and even she didn't do that very often any more. She had found herself caught between Harry and Ron and didn't like it. She had confided in Harry that she didn't want to be in the middle of their fight.

Harry had reluctantly agreed with her and watched in silent misery as she slowly started to distance herself from him. Her actions hurt him in more ways than he was willing to admit. He started to withdraw into himself.

Any competent muggle teacher would have recognized the signs and contacted the school psychologist, or the administration. Harry was becoming clinically depressed and presenting a danger to himself. But of course no such thing existed at Hogwarts. No one in a position to help was able to recognize that he'd been driven to the point where life had become more burden than blessing.

He looked down at the small model of the Horntail in his hand. He vaguely remembered hearing about them. The Horntail was one of the most dangerous dragons in the world and he was supposed to get past it? His body began to tremble as fear washed through him.

Maybe he could use it to his advantage. Maybe he didn't want to get past it.

The crowd roared outside and he glanced up. He bit his lower lip, realizing he would be called next. He could barely make out Ludo Bagman voice, as the spells on the tent muffled most of the noise.

Outside the tent, the judges cleared the display of their marks and then they waited. Krum had already gone to the medical tent to be checked, but they needed to wait until the Chinese Fireball and her nest had been removed from the arena.

A dozen men dressed in heavy protective clothing stepped into the arena. One of them glanced at the nest and noted most of the eggs had been destroyed during the task. He frowned and banished the nest with the one remaining egg still inside.

The dragon roared and strained against her chains. With a massive stretch, she managed to reach out and swipe at one man with a clawed paw. The man screamed and fell as his entrails spilled from his body.

Dozens of pain spells arced out from the remaining dragon handlers, while two medi-witches from St. Mungo's summoned the injured man to them rather than risk injury. The dragon roared and strained against the chains trying to break free, but the chain was too strong for the medium sized dragon.

The pain spells were the strongest known that didn't deliberately destroy nerves as the Cruciatus curse did. They needed multiple casting just to overcome the dragons inherent resistance to magic.

The wizards poured on the magic and finally the dragon cowered back in fear, whimpering under the onslaught of the pain spells. With the dragon submitting, one handler ran forward and released the chain from the locking ring attached to the stands. Several other handlers ran forward to join him and they pulled on the chain, leading the dragon out of the arena.

The dragon, still under multiple pain curses and thoroughly cowed by the handlers, let herself be led back to where they held the cages. She left the arena, head bowed, defeated.

The people in the stands waited patiently for the next dragon to appear.

Hermione sat with Neville, chewing on a fingernail nervously. The last few weeks had been especially hard on Harry. Lately she had started to worry that her reaction to Ron fighting with Harry had only made the situation a lot worse. She had distanced herself from both boys, trying to stay out of the fight. In doing so, she had hurt Harry even more. Now she was really afraid for him. The few times she had talked with him, he seemed emotionally cutoff and cold to her. And from some off hand comments he had made, she was becoming afraid her friend would do something rash.

Ron sat on the other side of Neville. He was still angry with Harry, but after seeing the dragons, he was suddenly afraid his room mate was being thrown to the proverbial lions, or in this case, dragons. He made up his mind that he'd forgive him if Harry came out of this alive.

A massive roar shook the stands and a wizard appeared with another nest containing the next dragon's eggs.

A huge Hungarian Horntail stomped into the arena, dragging the wizards who were trying to hold her by the chain. She had already killed three of them, and if she had her way she'd kill them all for what they've done.

When they came for her at the reserve she was certain it was her time to be culled, despite their rule to never cull a clutching dragon. Instead, they brought her and her eggs to this place.

Seeing her nest, she went over and nudged the eggs, but she already knew. All but one egg was dead, and the one probably wouldn't survive the trip back to the reserve. She reared up on her hind legs and trumpeted her anguish for all to hear.

People in the stands clapped their hands over their ears and ducked. Hermione stared at this monster in horror. Suddenly she was

convinced that Harry was going to die this day. The dragon handlers didn't seem to be able to control the beast!

One brave dragon handler rushed across the open arena, risking his life to attach the chain to the locking ring, then he dashed back to his fellows, barely escaping a blast of fire. The fire shot forth right across the nest, setting parts of it afire. The dragon jerked back and the stands she was attached to shook alarmingly.

The nest and the eggs smoked and steamed and she bowed her head in despair. Her own actions may have killed her last egg!

Hermione turned white and felt she was going to be sick. The beast was easily twice as large as any of the previous dragons. She glanced over to Neville, who was as white as she was.

"Oh, Hermione. This isn't good," he whispered.

"And now our forth contestant, Mr. Potter, will attempt to get his egg," Ludo Bagman said. His voice carried to every corner of the stadium. With a flourish and a wave of his wand, the flap to the tent opened by itself, signaling to Harry that it was his turn.

Reluctantly, Harry stepped from the tent and looked around at the crowded seats and the many faces who seemed eager to watch him fail.

"I refuse to participate," he said calmly. "But thank you for the means of rejoining my parents."

The stadium descended into shocked silence. Harry's voice carried easily to the stands, magnified by the spells in the arena.

The dragon turned to look at him, eying him warily. Harry calmly placed his wand in his back pocket and he slowly approached the dragon. A murmur swept through the crowd and Dumbledore stood up, alarmed by Harry's comment.

A small portion of the stands occupied by the Slytherins cheered Harry on, hoping to see him die a gory death.

"What is Potter doing?" asked Bagman in confusion, "He appears to be approaching the dragon and he isn't holding his wand!"

Dumbledore leaned over the railing, watching Harry and frowning. This wasn't right. He should have prevented this from happening. Harry Potter was calmly walking to his death!

Harry approached the dragon steadily, intent on one idea. If the dragon killed him, he'd be with his parents. That was better than being without magic and being sent back to the Dursleys. His fear drained away, replaced by a sense of calm acceptance as he moved closer. "It will be all over soon. It'll be quick," he said softly to himself, not realizing that the whole stadium could hear him.

"Harry!" screamed Hermione in anguish. She couldn't believe what was unfolding in front of her. Neville turned away, refusing to watch. Ron also looked away, his last glance was enough to cause him to throw up his breakfast. All around them, the other Gryffindors looked on in horror.

Harry stepped closer and the dragon decided enough was enough. She took a deep breath, intent on frying this upstart human, when a noise distracted both of them.

She turned to see her last living egg rocking back and forth. Cracks formed around the top as a snout pushed its way through. She turned and hunkered down close to the egg, crooning encouragement.

Unobserved by the adult dragon, Harry was also drawn to the spectacle. He moved closer, wanting a better view of the event. Something told him this was important, something about the rocking egg pulled at him.

The crowd started to murmur in confusion. Harry was ignoring the golden egg and the dragon was ignoring Harry. What was going on? A moment ago it looked like Potter was on the brink of death, now the dragon was ignoring him and he was ignoring the task's goal.

The egg rocked hard back and forth and suddenly it split wide open and out tumbled a dragonette the size of a full grown pony. The adult increased her crooning and the dragonette looked around, bleating helplessly. It took a faltering step and tripped, hitting its chin on the ground when it fell.

The little dragon bellowed in pain and Harry stepped forward to lift its head from the ground. As he did, their eyes met, and the world fell away.

"Hello, Harry! I have been waiting to meet you. I'm Chekiath," said a voice in his mind.

Harry reeled in surprise and his eyes grew as wide as saucers. "Did you say something?" he whispered to the little dragon.

"You know I did. Please don't be sad anymore, Harry. I don't care what the others say. I love you. I'll always love you. You are my rider," replied the little dragon.

Harry's legs gave out and he sat down heavily, staring into those huge expressive eyes that seemed to sparkle and twirl with amusement. His eyes filled with tears. For the first time in his life he experienced love and it was a love so intense and unlike any human love that he felt overwhelmed by the experience.

"I'm yours," he whispered. "We'll always be together." The depression, the longing for someone to care for him fell away as the bond solidified.

"Chekiath?" said a hesitant voice, as if unused to speaking.

Harry blinked and both he and the dragonette looked up at the adult Horntail. She stared at both for a moment longer. The adult dragon's eyes glowed a soft yellow and twirled slowly as if greatly confused by what was happening.

"I heard that," Harry said in his mind. "I heard her call your name!"

Chekiath looked back at Harry and nudged him slightly. "Well, why not? It is my name, you know. What else could she call me?"

Momnarth reared back on her hind legs and froze for several moments. Harry's mind touching hers had triggered a cascade of racial memories that rushed outward to all of Dragonkind.

Momnarth shook her head as if to clear it, then lowered herself close to the pair and extended her wings protectively around them. The baby and his rider must be protected at all costs!

Around the world, all activity ceased in every dragon reserve on the planet. As one, the dragons turned to face the direction of a castle in Scotland. The racial memories swept through the world's dragon population and a long forgotten history, as well as many abilities, were once again remembered.

"A RIDER HAS IMPRESSED!" The exalted cry came from thousands of dragons across the globe.

In moments, thousands of dragons were bugling and flaming. Panic descended in every reserve as the formerly controlled beasts broke free in joyous abandon.

Confusion reigned in the Quidditch stadium. Harry helped a baby dragon as it hatched, then the adult surrounded the pair with her wings, blocking them from view. Something unprecedented was happening, but no one knew what it was.

Momnarth raised her head and bellowed at the top of the lungs. "Dragons!" she called. "Dragons! A rider! A rider has been found!"

Harry moaned and pitched to his knees as suddenly hundreds of voices filled his head. Momnarth's eyes widened in shock and she withdrew her wings, exposing the newly impressed pair. Harry writhed on the ground in agony and Chekiath bellowed in dismay.

"A rider!" exclaimed a voice.

"Where? Where?" exclaimed another.

"A rider! The old ways return," shouted another voice.

Harry howled as hundreds of minds touched his and his scar split wide open. Black pus oozed from the wound and the crowd in the stands reared back in fright over the apparition appearing over Harry.

"Noooooooo!" wailed the cloudy figure. "You cannot defeat me! I am Lord Voldemort!"

Alarmed by the sense of evil emanating from the form taking shape before them, Momnarth flamed the apparition. An inhuman scream rose from the thing as it began to burn, then wither. The scream

became louder, more agonizing, before trailing off as the apparition burn to ash and was blown away by the breeze. She would defend the rider and his mate, even from a shade of evil.

Ludo Bagman signaled to the waiting dragon handlers and several started shooting pain curses at Momnarth.

Harry's eyes snapped open and he abruptly sat up. His head hurt terribly, but he had to protect the dragons! He turned to glare at the wizards and a number of them flinched under his glowing gaze. Blood oozed freely from his scar and it slid down his face, giving him a grim visage that alarmed some of the tough dragon handlers.

In Romania, Momnarth's entire reserve of dragons bellowed as one and leapt into the air. For the first time in nearly fifty millennia, dragons went Between.

Harry pushed Chekiath gently behind him, then he stepped in front of Momnarth. "Stay behind me, mother," he commanded softly.

"Potter!" shouted a dragon handler, "Get away from there!"

"You dare," hissed Harry in outrage. "You dare try to hurt the mother of my dragon?"

Dumbledore hurried down the stairs to join the dragon handlers in the arena. He had to stop this!

"He's gone nuts," exclaimed one dragon handler.

"Stupefy!" shouted another.

Harry shielded with an empty hand, then he whipped out his wand and slashed it violently down. The ground in front of the wizards erupted and they dove away. That was all he needed. Those few seconds were enough.

A terrifyingly cold blast of air hit the stadium and everything instantly frosted over. The skies were filled with hundreds of bellowing, flaming dragons.

Harry stumbled back into Momnarth. "The voices, too many," he gasped. Up close, so many minds were overwhelming him.

Momnarth carefully caught him and lowered him to the ground next to Chekiath. The little dragon snuffled at Harry with his snout and crooned piteously. He then looked at Momnarth. The dragons didn't understand that they were hurting his rider!

Momnarth bellowed again and the dragons settled on every available perch they could find, including most of the stands. The wizards panicked and most tried to hide in terror.

"Silence!" Momnarth commanded. "The Rider can hear all of us. The bond is new and we are overwhelming him."

Her command whipped across Dragonkind. Instantly, the sounds of so many voices diminished as the dragons recalled how to control their telepathy. And with that silence, Harry went limp. He lay panting and confused, trying to figure out what had happened.

A dozen Horntails landed around Momnarth and Chekiath, shielding them from the humans. As the guard formed up around the rider, another dragon flew off to find meat for the hatchling.

One ancient looking Horntail who still had a hint of bronze in his scales landed near Momnarth. The dragon looked carefully at the human on the ground, who was only semiconscious, then at Chekiath, who stood guard over his rider. Chekiath raised his head and stared down the ancient one as if daring him to deny what has happened. The ancient dragon easily out massed the baby by at least fifteen tons, but Chekiath refused to back down.

"Your loyalty does you credit, Chekiath, but you have nothing to fear from us. Your rider is our greatest treasure and we will die to protect you both if need be." Spath said, then he turned to Momnarth. "We cannot remain here. Much has been remembered and even now I can hear the others testing the humans nearby. There are potential riders here, but first we must gain control of this. We cannot allow impressions without consideration."

"Let Chekiath eat and the Rider rest first. The others all bespoke to him at one time and it overwhelmed him. This is new to us and we must be cautious. The Rider must be protected for the good of the Weyr."

Spath's eyes twirled with yellow stress and he nodded. "It will be as you say. I know of a place where we can rest in safety. Chekiath is too small to carry his rider or fly himself. We shall carry them to our new home."

A smaller dragon arrived overhead, clutching a terrified sheep in its claws. The Vipertooth swooped lower and dropped the wounded animal in front of Chekiath.

"Eat, Chekiath," said the Vipertooth. "You will feel better and so will the Rider."

Chekiath looked longingly at the beast, then at Harry.

"Eat, Chekiath. First hunger cannot be denied. We shall watch and protect your rider," Momnarth said gently.

The small dragonette pounced on the beast and started to feed. Almost immediately, Harry stirred and opened his eyes. The dragons had stopped trying to talk to him and Chekiath feeding was enough to rouse him. Despite the pain in his head, he felt better.

He sat up and put a hand to his head. "What a weird dream," he muttered.

"It was no dream, Harry," Chekiath replied. "Would you like to eat too? It might make you feel better."

Harry glanced over to his dragon and the bloody mess he was making. "Erm, thanks, mate, but I think I'll pass. I'm just glad your enjoying your meal."

"It's my first, and it's good," Chekiath replied, then he chomped down on a bone and it made a sharp cracking sound. Harry couldn't help but smile at the little dragon's enthusiasm. Nor could he ignore the joy and pride he felt from his dragon. They were together at last.

Albus Dumbledore was torn. The most important student ever to come to Hogwarts was currently surrounded by dragons. And the stadium was filled with the dangerous beasts. So many filled the stands that the students and guests were cowering in whatever

shelter they could find, hiding and hoping someone would rescue them.

Casting a sonorus on himself, he spoke. "Attention all students, staff and guests. Remain where you are and do not attempt to cast any magic. We are working to resolve this situation such that we all come out of this safely. Remember, hold your spells unless you are in imminent danger."

Canceling his spell, he hurried down the last few steps and out into the arena. He looked around and fought the primal urge to soil himself. The beasts were acting very strange and he didn't understand what was happening. He was hoping that perhaps by speaking with Harry he could learn more about the situation.

He passed one dragon handler who was down on his knees, nearly gibbering in terror. The man had been nudged away from Harry and Chekiath by two dragons and was seriously unnerved by the experience. Several dragons eyed Dumbledore's approach warily, then a small opening was made in their line, allowing him passage.

Sensing the old man meant no harm, Spath ordered the dragons to allow him passage through their line. Spath knew the situation was extremely dangerous for everyone and he sensed this human may be the key to keeping it under control.

Cautiously, Dumbledore stepped through the line. He paused just beyond it and noted an ancient dragon had joined Harry and the dragon Harry had been assigned for this task.

Harry turned and spotted Dumbledore making his way closer. He scowled and stepped in front Chekiath, shielding him from the headmaster.

Realizing his predicament, Dumbledore showed his hands to be empty. "I am not here to hurt you, Harry," he said softly.

Harry raised a hand and he stopped. "Tell you what, Headmaster. Why don't you put your wand on the ground right there and you can pick it up when we're done."

Dumbledore glanced around and noted the large number of dragons that were watching him intently from their positions in the stands. He

also knew they had an entire school at the mercy of wild beasts that Harry could somehow influence.

Nodding, he carefully removed his wand and placed it on the ground to one side, then he turned back to Harry. "I am unarmed, Harry."

Harry nodded and motioned for him to approach. He waited for the old man to come to within a few feet of him. "You lied to me," he spat. "Why?"

Albus blinked. "I'm not sure what you mean."

"You said I would lose my magic if I didn't compete. Now here I am, the task in ruins and I still have my magic," Harry said.

"Harry," Dumbledore began, "it was explained to me that there was a binding magical contract. If I had known that there wasn't, I would have insisted that you not participate. I honestly thought that making you compete was the only way to protect your magic."

Harry frowned and took a step backwards, crossing his arms in obvious disbelief. Then he did something which astounded Dumbledore. He turned to stare at the ancient dragon for a long moment. The dragonette crooned softly at Harry and Harry's expression softened.

"Spath says you are telling the truth. He also tells me that you're too forgiving of people, but that you hold no malice towards me," he said, after turning back from the dragon.

Dumbledore expression grew into astonishment. "You can understand the dragons?"

He nodded. "I don't know why I can hear them, but I do know that the wizarding world is wrong. Dragons are not mindless beasts. Chekiath," he said, then paused and looked at his little dragon with intense affection in his gaze. "Chekiath is my dragon and I am his rider. We are meant to be together."

"Harry, it is time for us to leave this place. More men are coming," Momnarth warned. Some of the dragons, still airborne, had noted the large group of Aurors assembling nearby.

Harry glanced up at the big dragon and nodded, then he turned back to Dumbledore. "I'm sorry, sir, but it's time for us to leave. Momnarth tells me that more wizards are coming. If we don't leave now, this task will go down in history as the greatest disaster ever at Hogwarts."

Harry paused and looked pensive. "For the past few years you have given me shelter from the Dursleys. And while my time at Hogwarts was by no means perfect, it was better than the time spent with them. I thank you for that."

"But what about your schooling, your magic?" exclaimed Dumbledore in dismay. Potter leaving was a disaster! He wasn't too concerned about the prophecy. After all, if Harry was meant to confront Voldemort, fate would ensure that it happened.

Harry shrugged. His priorities had changed the moment his gaze met Chekiath's. "Who needs magic when I have my dragon?"

Chekiath thrummed approvingly and all the other dragons took up his call.

Dumbledore glanced around nervously. Harry's answer had all of the dragons thrumming. The sound could literally be felt in the old man's bones. The situation had thrown him for a loop. Harry Potter had walked out into the arena with one purpose clear in his mind, then it was derailed instantly by what appeared to be a bonding of some sort. It was almost too much to wrap his mind around.

Harry reached for his wand and held it out to Dumbledore. The old man shook his head, his eyes glistening with tears, "No, my boy, keep it. Tomorrow I will send Fawkes to you with some books so that you may keep up with your studies. I know our world will not take well to discovering dragons are not mindless beasts. They will need someone who knows our ways and who can protect them."

"Hold your wand out, Harry, and I will dispel the tracking charm on it," Albus said.

Surprised, Harry did just that and the headmaster muttered something under his breath before waving his hand over the wand. It glowed a soft pink, then faded back to normal.

"Thank you, sir," he said.

Albus smiled at the boy who seemed to have grown up tremendously in just the past hour.

Harry frowned for a moment, thinking. "Will you send Hedwig to me, sir?"

"I will. And I hope you will continue to use her to stay in contact. I'm sorry I haven't always done my best for you, but I will try to do better."

Harry nodded. "I will stay in touch, sir, When I know more about what's going on, I'll do my best to explain it to you."

Momnarth gently nudged Harry, then lifted a massive leg. "Climb onto my back, Harry," she said.

Harry looked at her in surprise, then he did as he was told. Spath watched for a moment longer, then he took Chekiath into his front paws and sprang aloft.

Harry slid into position just in front of Momnarth's shoulders and she reared back on her hind legs. "Dragons to wing!" she called.

Not quite understanding the need, Harry raised his fist and pumped it in the traditional command to order the wings aloft. Momnarth leapt into the air gracefully, ever mindful of the human sitting on her back. It seemed like the place where he sat was designed specifically for that purpose and it felt very, very right.

Dumbledore stood alone in the empty space and watched with a touch of awe as nearly 500 dragons sprang aloft, swiftly rising above the stadium. Suddenly, several dragons swooped down on the stands. He watched in alarm, thinking they were attacking, but then he noticed they were looking at a single student and making no aggressive moves. In a few cases, the dragon reached out and touched the student before rejoining their fellows in the air.

Albus staggered back as a massive blast of cold air rocked him and all the dragons vanished.

There was a moment of dead silence in the stands, then the panic set in. People jumped to their feet and ran for the stairs. In a few cases, they were so crowded some people were injured in the crush.

Albus quickly picked up his wand and cast a sonorus on himself. "Students!" he shouted. "All students are to assemble in the Great Hall. Prefects and staff are to take attendance once everyone is assembled. Go calmly to the Hall. The danger has passed."

Feeling more tired than he thought possible, he turned and trudged towards the school. Ludo Bagman spotted him heading for the exit and made to intercept him. "Headmaster! Headmaster! What happened to Potter?"

Dumbledore turned to glare at the man. "You told me there was a binding magical contract when there obviously wasn't. Why did you lie to me?"

Bagman took a step back and he looked guilty. "It was Barty Crouch's idea. He said we'd get more media interest in the tournament if Potter were made to compete."

"Did you charm the cup to spit out Harry's name?" demanded Dumbledore.

Bagman shook his head. "No! I just assumed Barty did something to it, but I didn't cast anything on the cup. To be honest, I'm not sure I could."

Dumbledore stared at the man for a moment longer. Bagman was right about one thing, he wasn't a very strong or a very good wizard. "I'm an old fool," he muttered, shaking his head.

"Where is Potter?" asked Bagman again.

"He's gone, Ludo, gone from this school and gone from your tournament. And come tomorrow, I will ensure that everyone knows what you and Crouch did," Dumbledore replied tiredly, then he turned and trudged away.

Hogwarts Great Hall...

Millicent Bulstrode sat at Slytherin table with her fellow Slytherin, but unlike them, her mood was more pensive than it was panicked. She had hidden herself in the stands as best as she was able, but when the dragons took flight she crawled out from her hiding spot and looked around in bewilderment. It was at that moment that it happened. A dragon swooped down and reached out with a viciously clawed paw and touched her shoulder.

A shudder ran through her at the time, but it wasn't a shudder of fear. No, this was something different and she couldn't put her finger on it.

Looking around she could see prefects and staff from all three schools dashing about, taking down names and looking for people. Dumbledore had been the last person to enter the Great Hall and she was shocked to see how old and haggard he appeared. It was as if he had aged a hundred years in the walk from the Quidditch pitch. He also appeared to be very, very angry.

Dumbledore walked up to the staff table and waited while Minerva McGonagall consulted with staff from the other schools. Finally, she turned and walked over to Dumbledore and began to whisper to him intently.

Millicent looked around and she couldn't help noting that some of the other students were looking around like she was, as if they were looking for something.

"If I may have everyone's attention please," called Dumbledore.

Those in the hall slowly settled and all eyes turned to the Headmaster.

Dumbledore sighed heavily and he stroked his long beard for a moment. "I wish to apologize to everyone here today. I truly believed that the tournament was a good thing and would be a boon to the students to take part in such a momentous event. Alas, I did not realize that I had been lied to."

He paused and peered at the students, then he waved a hand, encompassing everyone in the hall. "We have all been lied to," he said gravely. A murmur arose and he waited for it to subside. "I was told that the cup represented a binding magical contract. So when Harry Potter's name came out of the cup, I felt I had no choice but to

make him compete. From what I understood at the time, I thought I was protecting Mr. Potter and his magic. But, alas, I was not. Because of that lie, I helped force a fourteen year old student into a competition he was unprepared to compete in."

He paused again and peered over his glasses. "Let me state this right now so that there is no mistake by anyone. Mister Potter did not willingly enter his name into the cup. The cup was ensorcelled to spit out his name. Someone who had very dubious motives decided that Harry Potter should compete in this tournament.

"Why this was, I do not yet know, but I intend to find out," he said, glaring over at Ludo Bagman and Barty Crouch.

"There is nothing worse than an old fool and I have been a very old fool. I allowed a student to be entered into a tournament he was ill equipped to participate in. And I allowed him to be publicly mocked and ridiculed by both the students and the staff. I was willing to ignore your behavior despite the damage we were causing to a boy who had done nothing to deserve such cruel treatment.

"In my old age I thought that by being lenient I could guide many of you who are leaning towards a darker path, back to the light. I have allowed bullying to take place in my school when I should have prevented it. That ends today."

Dumbledore turned towards Slytherin house. "Mister Malfoy, due to the lack of a house cup competition this year I cannot deduct points, therefore you will serve detentions four nights a week until the end of the year. And the next time you think to mock a student, I will personally expel you from this school, never to return."

Malfoy looked up at Dumbledore. Strangely, he didn't protest. He simply nodded, then looked down at the table as if he were ashamed of his actions.

Snape stood and Dumbledore shot him a hard glare that clearly told him to hold his tongue. Cowed by the Headmaster, he slowly sat down, fuming to himself.

Turning back to the stunned students, he couldn't help but smile slightly as many of them pulled the "Potter Stinks" badges from their

robes. The sound of the badges hitting the tables or the floor echoed in the hall and seemed to be a testimony to their shame.

"You might have noticed that Harry Potter is not sitting among his house tonight. Mister Potter learned something truly exciting and astounding. As a result of this new knowledge and your actions toward him this year, he has withdrawn from Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. It is unlikely that he will ever return to these halls again."

His statement received stunned silence.

Ron and Hermione shared an anguished look between them as they suddenly felt the guilt for what they had done to Harry this year. They had abandoned their friend when he needed them and now there was no way of mending that breach.

Dumbledore continued, ignoring the pained looks at the Gryffindor table. "Mister Potter today discovered that dragons are not mindless beasts like we had always assumed. I spoke with him briefly in the arena, and while I was there, I witnessed him speaking with the dragons and they with him."

A murmur swept through the hall and even the staff looked stunned by this revelation.

"One of the dragons told Mister Potter that more wizards were approaching and he decided he would leave with them. I tried to talk him out of it, but he told me that magic wasn't important to someone who had a dragon."

Dumbledore looked around and his shoulders drooped a little. "Today we sit a little bit wiser and a whole lot sadder. A student has left the school and we are left pondering what it all means. For myself, I find that his decision to leave was prompted by his forced participation in the tournament, the total lack of support from the staff and the overwhelming animosity that you showed a fellow student.

"Harry Potter was hounded from this school by cruel badges and mean words. We saw a young wizard with a promising future pushed to the very brink of suicide, and if not for the intervention of a dragon, I am certain we would be mourning his loss right now.

"I have much to atone for with regard to Harry Potter. He left because I failed to support him as I should have and I deeply regret that. He also left because his fellow students failed to support him and I find that utterly heartbreaking. You have expressed a measure of cruelty on a fellow student that drove him to make a life altering decision and each of you will have to come to grips with the fact that you will be forever known as the generation that drove Harry Potter to abandon the magical world.

"I am ashamed. I am ashamed of my own actions and of yours. Our actions brought Hogwarts much dishonor this day."

There was a moment of silence, then all of the house banners rolled up and vanished. It seemed as if the school agreed with Albus. Today was a day of shame. House crests on every uniform robe in the hall turned black to remind people of dishonor. Even the founders would not support such behavior.

Dumbledore stopped and looked around the hall. A few were glaring at him, openly defiant, but a great many were staring at the tables in shame. He nodded to himself, then he walked out of the hall without a single glance back.

Hermione looked at Ron and her lower lip trembled. Suddenly her actions of the past month seemed utterly reprehensible to her. She'd had a close encounter with a dragon and instead of feeling terror, the dragon looked at her with sadness and a terrible sense of disappointment that only served to magnify her guilt.

At the Hufflepuff table, Susan Bones watched the scene unfolding in the hall, but her mind kept going back to the dragon that flew down to her and touched her. For a brief moment she felt something stir in her that she couldn't explain.

Now, she felt a loss. She hadn't been close friends of Potter. In fact, the house had rallied around Cedric and she had proudly worn a button against Harry. She suddenly realized that she had been wrong and Harry now had something that she wished she had.

Among the other students there were others who felt as Susan did. They had been touched by something special and they didn't understand what it meant.

Luna Lovegood at Ravenclaw felt only excitement. She was sad for Harry, but a dragon had touched her and suddenly she knew that her life had a bigger meaning than life as a picked on third year. She knew somewhere out there the other half of herself was waiting for her and she hoped they'd meet soon.

Minerva shook herself from her shock and stood. "Students, please return to your common rooms. Dinner will be served at its normal time."

Silently the students filed from the room. The Headmaster had publicly exposed their shame in front of several high ranking Ministry members and the other two schools. The students left feeling like they were two inches tall and not very pleased with themselves.

Disko Island, Greenland, November 15th...

Momnarth landed gently, then lifted a leg to give Harry something to climb down.

He slid from her and patted her flank fondly. "Thank you, Momnarth," he said softly. The trip between had caught him by surprise but it had been over very quickly. It had been bitterly cold and had it lasted longer he was sure he would have suffered frostbite.

Spath alighted next to her and he lowered Chekiath to the ground. Harry immediately went to his dragon, checking to make sure he was all right. That task completed, he looked around. A cold wind swept across the ground, but not far away he could see small ponds that steamed and bubbled, heated by the magma below the surface.

"This is a good place to weyr," Spath said. "The waters and caves are warm."

"Is there food nearby?" asked Momnarth.

Spath looked towards the sea in the distance. "Sometimes. The waters around this island have much life, but there are no flocks

here. I learned of this place from my elder. It was a place to come when we needed refuge. He said that it took many days to come here. Going Between makes it much faster."

Harry looked between the two dragons. "I'm sorry, but could we back up a bit? Let's start by explaining what has happened. How can I suddenly hear you in my mind?"

Spath turned to Harry, his eyes slowly twirling. "Rider, there is much we must talk about."

Harry held up a hand and Spath went silent. "I know I'm only a kid, but please, just call me Harry."

"You honor us, Rider. Only your dragon should call you by such familiarity. However, if it makes you more comfortable, I will do so when we are alone," Spath replied reluctantly.

Harry nodded and looked at Momnarth, who bobbed her head in acknowledgment.

Spath moved closer to one of the steaming ponds, then he lowered himself to the ground on the warm rocks. Harry followed Spath closely, with Chekiath following by only a few feet. Momnarth settled herself in a position that shielded Harry from the bitter wind that swept down off the cliff top.

Harry welcomed the warmth of the rocks and the steam rising from the waters. After the cold of Between, he needed to warm up. I'm going to need a jacket or something if we're going to be doing a lot of that, he mused.

"Once, many turns ago, this mountain burned and spat fire," Spath said. Harry closed his eyes and in his mind he could picture the image. "Much has been forgotten over the turns, but some few of us remembered pieces. Then you, young rider, you came along and impressed young Chekiath. In doing so, you have awoken our memories. We remember now what we once were."

Around them the other dragons settled on the cliff face or among the rocks. Spath lifted his head and took in the sight of so many dragons. "Listen, o' kin, hear then the tale of who we once were and who we can be again."

Spath turned his attention back to Harry, who sat on the rough rocks facing him. Chekiath had curled up behind him close enough to be touching. Harry smiled at his dragon and leaned back against him. Chekiath rumbled softly and his eyes twirled with pleasure as Harry absently scratched around his ears.

"Long ago, across uncounted turns, we lived on a world that had a terrible enemy. The wise men of that world didn't understand it until it was too late. It wasn't until the menace was upon them that they realized how poorly prepared they were to handle this foe.

"We were created to help men combat that enemy and for many turns we did just that. Each dragon had a rider and together they were a bonded pair, living one for the other. The men of that world honored us and we honored them. We protected them and they helped care for us. We were partners and with our human riders we were the Dragon Riders that protected Pern."

Spath look up again, his old gaze taking in the rest of the dragons. "There was no greater force than the love between dragon and rider."

Harry could easily believe that statement. In a single instant, his life had altered radically and what he felt for Chekiath was unlike anything he had ever felt before.

The bowl full of dragons hummed in approval and Harry could hear the soft murmur of many voices in his mind, and with them came images of men and women and their dragons rising up on great wings to flame and sear the enemy from the skies. He marveled at the imagery and found it difficult to comprehend.

Spath turned back to lock his twirling eyes on the new Rider and his dragon. "The enemy attacked in falls lasting 50 turns or more and then there would be an interval lasting even longer where no thread spun out. During the interval, man would nurture and protect the dragons and we would be safe until needed again.

"Then some twenty turns before the pass would begin, the queens would rise and dragons would grow in number. Great clutches would be laid and the Weyrs continued to prosper, as all Pern prepared itself for the coming pass.

"During one such turn, a great queen met a tragic fate. Heavy with egg, an accident befell her rider. She was a young queen and her anguish at losing her rider cannot be described. Like so many of our kind, she decided to leave by taking the endless jump Between.

Spath paused and the dragons in the bowl keened. As one, they honored that queen by lowering their heads to the ground. She was their ultimate ancestor.

Sensing the mood, Harry also bowed his head. In his mind, he could see the huge golden queen, her belly bulging with eggs. He could hear her bellow her anguish echo across a volcanic bowl, much like this one, and then she leapt aloft and winked out of existence.

He was struck by the shocked looks on the faces of the people who watched the queen realize her rider was forever gone.

"Sidraneth was her name," continued Spath. "She thought she was going to the great sleep. Instead, she came here, to the home world of our creators, in a time many turns ago. She is the mother of our kind on this world."

Harry sat up suddenly. He had picked up an image of a badly exhausted golden dragon appearing from Between over a plain covered with bison and wooly mammoths.

"She went into the past?" exclaimed Harry out loud. "Our past?" He was no expert, but even he knew the wooly mammoth existed many thousands of years ago. That meant that she had come across space and time, and from a planet man wouldn't even find for hundreds, if not thousands of years in the future!

Harry stared at Spath who rumbled with the dragon version of laughter.

"Our creators gave us a great many abilities, young Rider," Spath replied. "Sidraneth thought she was jumping to die. Instead, she came here and became the mother to our race. She was badly sickened by the jump and when she recovered, she was too heavy with egg to try again. Once she laid her eggs, she knew that, without man, she would have to care for her offspring."

"It was a crime against our creation, for we were not meant to be without riders. For countless turns, we existed, changing from what we were. And in those turns, we lost ourselves. But locked within each of us was the memory of what we had been and what we could be again."

"You, young Rider," added Momnarth, "gave us back our memory and our heritage. Now, we dragons are pledged to protect you, as you will protect us. With your help, we can break free from the wizards who kill our kind."

Harry's expression darkened. "Wand cores, blood for potion stocks, hide for armor," he murmured angrily. This could not stand! He stood and paced back and forth a few times. "This can't be allowed, but how? I'm only a kid," he exclaimed plaintively to Spath.

"We must rebuild the Weyr, young Rider," answered Spath. "Only then can we address the other issues. As Sidraneth was the first of our kind, you must be the first of your kind. You must be the First Rider. You must be the Weyrleader."

Harry stared at Spath in awe as an image of a great volcanic caldera teeming with people and dragons filled his mind. Then he looked around at the cliffs surrounding this place, noting the many caves and the dragons perched at the mouth of each of them. Their eyes shone in the deepening gloom and he was stunned to realize they there counting on him to help them.

"You can do it, Harry," said Chekiath, "And I will help you. We'll rebuild the Weyrs together and it will be good."

Headmaster's office, evening time, November 15th...

Minerva and Severus entered the Headmaster's office. Both were worried, but for different reasons.

Dumbledore stood in front of his shelf full of charmed trinkets.

"Albus?" Minerva said softly.

He reached out and touched the small spinning disk that puffed smoke. "For years now this device has been tied to the well being of Harry Potter," he said softly. "I knew every time he was hurt by his

relatives. I knew every time he was unhappy because they locked him up or failed to offer a kind word to him at Christmas. And I did nothing about it."

He stopped the disk from spinning, breaking the enchantment, then he turned to face his teachers. "Professors? Please, be seated."

Once each had done as directed, Dumbledore turned to Snape. "I am not unaware of your treatment of Harry Potter, Severus. I had hoped that you could put aside your hatred for his father and treat the son fairly. Things are going to change in this school. You will either agree to abide by my policies or you will find yourself looking for work."

Snape blinked and looked at Albus in surprise. "Sir?" he said reluctantly.

Dumbledore looked at him hard for a moment, then he nodded. "I will no longer condone any bullying by anyone," he said firmly. "I don't care who their parents are. This school has had a code of conduct for its students for over nine hundred years and we will enforce it. I have instructed the school to reactivate the Code of Conduct."

Minerva nodded, looking vindicated, then asked the obvious question. "Albus, what about Harry?"

Dumbledore looked at his trinkets once more, his expression very remorseful, then he looked at her. "Today I learned that creatures we feared and thought to be nothing more than mindless beasts, are, in fact, as intelligent as we are. I also watched Mister Potter communicate with those creatures, using nothing more than his mind."

He walked over to his chair to sit, then he looked at his senior professors. "In all of the magical world, mind speech is known to exist only in the very rare soul bonds between two people. I can only assume that Mister Potter somehow bonded to that newly born dragon, and through that new connection, he was able to communicate with the adults."

Seeing her incredulous look, he stood and went to his pensieve. Extracting the memory, he then played it over the bowl for both of

them to view. The conversation between Harry and the Headmaster played out in miniature over the bowl and both gasped when Harry freely offered his wand to the Headmaster.

"That's not normal behavior for Potter," muttered Snape.

Dumbledore glanced over at the dour man, but he realized that he wasn't making one of his usual snide comments this time. He paused the playback so he could reply. "No, it wasn't normal behavior, but then, all the records on soul bonded couples also note that the individuals involved had their own personalities change after the bond established itself."

Snape nodded thoughtfully and motioned for the Headmaster to resume playing back the memory.

"Look at that," whispered Minerva in awe, "He just looked at the beast and knew that the Ministry Aurors were assembling nearby."

Dumbledore nodded, then he added a new memory to the bowl. "What you've just seen wasn't the only unusual thing to happen today. This happened shortly after Mister Potter interacted with the baby dragon."

He played back the segment where the shade was expelled from Harry's scar and the dragon blasted it apart with dragon fire.

The two teachers stared at the images in horror, then Dumbledore ended the playback and returned the memories to his mind. Sitting back down, he stared at his desk for a moment before speaking again. "When Harry was checked out by Madam Pomfrey shortly after the attack that killed his parents, the scar resisted her attempts at healing. Unhappy with that, she called me in to check it out and I found the scar was heavily imbued with dark magic containing the signature of Lord Voldemort. I later taught Poppy the detection spells I used and she told me that his scar still contained the same signature when he came to school ten years later. And now, that," he said, pointing towards the pensieve. "The bonding process must have forced the dark magic from him."

Minerva looked pale from viewing the image of Lord Voldemort being blasted by dragon fire. "But, Albus, his schooling! Where will he go? What will he do?"

Dumbledore sighed. "Minerva, if we assume that Harry had indeed bonded with a dragon much like the soul bond, we could not separate him from his bonded. You know the Ministry would never allow a dragon to stay here at Hogwarts. He left with the other dragons. I will collect his trunk and his owl tomorrow and send them to him, via Fawkes. He will go wherever the dragons go. I feel certain that his fate and his future are firmly tied to theirs."

Minerva bowed her head, realizing that she, too, had failed a student, one of her lion cubs. "I shall miss him," she whispered.

Snape snorted and she shot him a glare.

"Yes, we shall," agreed Dumbledore.

Disko Island, Greenland, November 15th...

Harry sat in the small cave, deep in thought. Nearby, Chekiath snoozed lightly. He knew Harry had a bit of a problem, but right now they really had no way of solving it. To put it bluntly, Harry was hungry.

There was no wood for a fire, and nothing to cook even if he could make a fire, so he sat in the comfortable cave and thought about the problem for a long time before it suddenly hit him.

"Dobby?" he called out loud.

Dobby appeared, looking happily at Harry, then he took in his surroundings. In a blink, Dobby was climbing Harry, trying to get away from the dragon that was looking at him with interest.

"Dragons, Harry Potter, sir! Dobby will..."

"Dobby!" Harry shouted.

Dobby blinked and looked down at Harry Potter. He was sitting on the boy's shoulder, trembling in fear.

"What is that, Harry?" Chekiath asked curiously. "Can I eat him? Is he tasty?"

Harry turned to Chekiath. "No, you can't eat Dobby. He's my friend and friends don't eat friends."

Dobby whimpered and shivered on Harry's shoulder.

"Oh," Chekiath replied, sounding disappointed. "He does look tasty, though."

Dobby whimpered at Harry. "Dragons eat Dobby, Harry Potter, sir?"

"No, Dobby, he's not going to eat you. I want you to say hello to Chekiath. He's my friend. You're my friend. I'd like you both to be friends."

"Dragon no eat Dobby?"

Harry shook his head. "No, Dobby, Chekiath won't eat you. He'll be your friend, if you want."

Dobby eyed Chekiath fearfully for a moment longer, then slid to the floor and clutched at Harry's robe, carefully keeping some distance between him and the little dragon. "Dobby is happy to meet Cheki dragon."

"Cheki?"

Harry smiled. "Dobby sometimes has problems with names," he replied.

Dobby glanced up at Harry, then at the little dragon again, his brow furrowing. "Harry Potter can talk with Cheki?"

"I can Dobby, but before I start explaining everything, do you think you could pop back to Hogwarts and bring me my trunk and maybe something to eat? I've not eaten since breakfast."

Dobby nodded so fast his ears flapped for a moment, then he vanished with a small pop. A moment later he returned with Harry's trunk and a platter of sandwiches and several bottles of Butterbeer.

Harry's eyes lit up seeing the food and he eagerly reached for a sandwich. Dobby looked around curiously. "Harry Potter, sir? Where is your bed?"

Harry grinned around his sandwich and he swallowed before answering. "Well, I don't think we're at our final spot yet, Dobby, so we are just going to have to do without for the time being."

Dobby frowned. "Harry Potter can'ts be sleeping on hard stone floor. Oh no, sir, thats will never do."

Dobby vanished again and a moment later he returned with a small bed that looked like he had taken it right out of the Hogwarts Infirmary.

Harry eyed the bed for a moment. "Did you take that from Madam Pomfrey's ward?"

Dobby nodded happily and Harry sighed. "Oh well. It's not like she can yell at me for it, and I know the bed is comfortable."

Dobby snapped his fingers and a large pile of blankets appeared. Using several, he marked out a small corner of the cave for himself. "Harry Potter is going to need Dobby, so Dobby will sleep here."

Dobby looked at his little nest in satisfaction, then he eyed Chekiath for a moment. "Is Harry Potter sure dragon won't eat Dobby?"

Harry glanced over his sandwich towards the little dragon who looked at him for a moment, then Chekiath turned to Dobby.

"Harry has asked me to be your friend, Dobby," Chekiath said. "Like he said, we don't eat friends."

Dobby blinked in surprise at the voice in his mind, then he smiled shyly at the dragon. "Dobby would like that Cheki."

Harry smiled at the pair. "It's like I said, Chekiath, Dobby's kind have been treated as badly as dragons. Yet he's still a thinking being, like you and I."

"It is different. Yesterday, all dragons considered everything that moved as food. Today it all changed when you became my rider," replied Chekiath. The little dragon raised his head and looked fondly at Harry, his eyes softly glowing and twirling with affection.

Harry finished his sandwich, then he went over to the large pile of blankets that Dobby brought. Selecting two for himself, he then took the rest and started to lay them out on the floor near his bed. Chekiath watched from his spot.

"What are you doing, Harry?"

He glanced up and grinned. "I'm setting up a bed for you, my friend. I know the cave is warm but the rocks aren't very soft. At least the blankets will add a bit of padding."

Chekiath snuffled softly and walked over to the little nest of blankets, then he curled up on top of them and gave a sigh. They were more comfortable than the bare stone.

This spot is much better, Chekiath thought to himself. It was close enough that when Harry laid down he could reach out and stroke his dragon's neck and scratch behind his ears.

#12 Grimmauld Place, London, November 16th...

"Any word yet, Moony?" asked Sirius. The wanted felon had returned from his warm tropical hiding spot to this deary house when Harry was forced into the tournament.

Remus shook his head. "No, and the paper hasn't been delivered yet."

Fawkes suddenly flashed into the room and both men started. "I've got it," Remus said, reaching for the scroll Fawkes offered him. The large bird sat on a trunk he had brought with him.

"It always scares the crap out of me when that bird arrives. I think he does it on purpose," Sirius muttered.

Fawkes turned to look at Sirius and the large bird hooted several times at him as if to say, "Yeah, I do, and it's always funny to scare you."

"Siri?" Remus said softly, then he looked up from the scroll. "Harry's left the school!"

Sirius jumped to his feet. "He what?"

"According to this, yesterday's task resulted in Harry somehow bonding to a dragon. Dumbledore thinks it's like a soul bound with mind speech and maybe other aspects. He doesn't know. What he does know is that Harry left the school with the dragons. He wants us to add to the trunk any books we feel Harry might be able to use to learn magic from. Fawkes will wait around and take the trunk when we're done with it."

"Does he say where Harry went?"

"No, it doesn't say."

Sirius pondered for a moment, then he nodded to himself. "Right then, you start looking over the books in the library and pulling what we'll need."

"We?"

"You don't think we're going to let the son of Prongs run around without some sort of supervision, do you?"

"Yeah, but who's going to supervise you?" Remus asked pointedly.

Sirius looked smug. "That's why I'm bringing you along, Moony, my friend!" he proclaimed grandly. At Remus' frown he sighed and grew serious. "Look, we don't know what's going on yet. I'm going to write a letter to Harry, asking if he'd like us to join him. We'll put it on top of the books in the trunk."

Remus' frown lessened a little.

"Remus," Sirius continued, "I'm going stir crazy here! If Harry is someplace away from the Aurors, I'll jump at a chance to leave this dirt hole. Besides, he's my godson." He shook his head. "I lost him once due to my own actions. I won't lose him again if I can help it."

Remus nodded. "All right. Write your letter we'll see if Prongs Junior can use some old mischief makers."

Sirius nodded and Fawkes ruffled his feathers and honked in agreement.

Headmaster's Office, Hogwarts, November 16th, early morning...

Albus nursed a headache and tiredly rubbed at his temples. It wasn't even eight in the morning and already he had people in his office complaining to him. Less than an hour earlier, he had sent Fawkes off with a trunk half full of books and a quick note to Sirius and Remus. Now, he'd give almost anything to have his familiar back, just so he could make his own escape.

Minerva and Madam Pomfrey sat across from his desk and looked at him expectantly. Both were there to complain about things. Poppy was inexplicably missing an infirmary cot and some blankets. Minerva had come to report that all of Harry Potter's personal effects had vanished.

"Poppy, I understand your concern, but I don't believe for a moment that a missing bed means someone is going to come back for some of your restricted potions. If they could sneak into your ward and remove a bed without you knowing about it, they could have easily taken your potions already. No, I suspect a far more benign reason for your missing bed."

"And that is?" snapped an irate Poppy. She was a good healer, but like so many, she hated when her neat, orderly world was disrupted, and a missing cot disrupted her world.

"Yesterday a student left the school in the company of dragons, Poppy. I daresay he was completely safe in their company, but I can't see them going to the Leaky Cauldron for a room," he replied mildly.

"Harry Potter is no thief!" exclaimed Minerva angrily.

"Nor did I call him one. Although to be honest, Professor, even if he had taken the bed, I would not begrudge him a place to sleep. No, I think we must look a little farther afield for the culprit of this theft. When I went to retrieve Mister Potter's belongings this morning, they were already gone, as you had already discovered, Minerva.

"Curious, I found that Hogwarts has another missing individual this morning. I do hope this isn't a trend, or come Christmas I'll have no one left to pull crackers with," Albus said with a smile.

Minerva looked alarmed. "Who, Albus?"

"Dobby, the former Malfoy elf that I hired after Harry's second year, has gone missing. I'm sure you recall that Dobby was unusually devoted to Mister. Potter. I believe he has gone to join Harry and has been coming back here to help himself to items that he thinks Harry needs."

Both women exchanged a glance between them and they relaxed a little. The elf was known to worship Harry and both could see him helping the boy.

"I've instructed our head elf that Dobby is to be left alone, unless he does something to endanger the students. So far, I know he's taken the bed, blankets, and some food. Actually, I am comforted by the idea that Dobby is taking care of our missing student."

Dumbledore paused at the knock on his door. "Come!" he called.

The door opened and Snape stormed into the room in an absolute fury. "Headmaster! One of the students has broken into my private quarters and stolen my desk and chair!" he exclaimed. "I demand that you find the person responsible and expel them!"

The two women exchanged an amused glance. With a renewed headache and a heavy sigh, he began his explanation again, knowing fully that this person would not be as relieved by his ideas as the two women were.

Disko Island Weyr, Greenland, November 16th...

Harry woke to a feeling of intense hunger that he couldn't explain. He put his glasses on and turned to see Chekiath heading to the exit of the cave. "Where are you off to, Cheki?" he called.

"One of the other dragons brought a sheep for me, Harry. I'm sorry if I woke you but I did not have much of a meal yesterday," he replied.

Harry smiled. "No worries, mate. I was just concerned."

He looked around and noted that Dobby was gone from his little nest, so he reached for a sandwich still on the platter from last night.

We're going to need so much stuff, he thought worriedly. How will we get any of it?

Suddenly he could hear the sound of dragons bellowing and underneath that, the terrified bleating of sheep. Curious, he stood up. The dragons didn't sound like they were angry or afraid of something.

Pulling on a heavy jumper he slipped into his shoes and rushed to the exit. Once there, he stopped in surprise. The bottom of the caldera was filling up with livestock. There had to be two hundred sheep and an equal number of cows in the bowl now. Dragons were circling the herd and every so often one dragon would swoop down to grab an animal.

Harry's brows knitted in confusion, then it dawned on him. "Dobby?"

Dobby appeared, looking at Harry anxiously. "You call for Dobby, Harry Potter, sir?"

"Where did you get the animals?"

Dobby looked ashamed. "Big dragons won't eat Dobby if they have something else to eat. Dobby knows they likes cows and sheepies. Bad old master would sometimes beat Dobby because a dragon stole sheepies. So I took bad old master's sheepies. His good friend Fudgies cows wanted to come here too." He looked at Harry fearfully. "Did Dobby do wrong, Harry Potter, sir?"

Harry sat heavily on the rocks and stared at Dobby in amazement. "You stole Malfoy's sheep and Minister Fudgies...er Fudge's cows?"

Dobby nodded again, looking worriedly at Harry.

"Dobby! That's brilliant!" Harry exclaimed, then he reached out and pulled Dobby into a brief hug.

Dobby glanced over Harry's shoulder and he took a step backwards. Spath had landed nearby and walked over to where Harry was talking with Dobby.

"Good morning to you, Spath," Harry said politely.

"And to you, Weyrleader. I have much I would speak with you about this morning."

Harry nodded. "Yes, I have some questions for you, as well. But first I'd like to ask, can you speak to all people or is it just wizards? Last night, Chekiath spoke to Dobby here."

Spath rumbled softly and positioned himself so the morning sun hit him fully. "We can bespeak to anyone, Weyrleader, but until your impression we had forgotten how."

Harry nodded and walked over to where Dobby stood, trembling. "Could you ask the other dragons to be nice to Dobby? He is my friend and he's frightened that he will be eaten."

Spath's eyes twirled in amusement. "Weyrleader, this is one of the things I wanted to speak of. You have a rare ability. Even in the time of the riders, only a very few could bespeak to any dragon. Yet we all hear you, as you hear us. And as Weyrleader, you can simply command us and we will obey."

Harry shook his head. "I'm too young yet to be a leader of anything, Spath," he said in protest. "But I will ask that Dobby and others like him are treated with dignity. His kind have been treated as badly as yourselves."

In his mind he could hear a gentle murmur of agreement and several Dragons turned towards Dobby and greeted him. Dobby looked stunned, then smiled shyly at the great creatures.

"All right there, Dobby?" asked Harry.

Dobby looked at Harry with awe. "Harry Potter is truly a great wizard to make dragons like Dobby."

Harry grinned. "No, but hopefully someday I'll be a good dragon rider," he replied, then he turned back to Spath.

"You're good enough for me," Chekiath said softly to him.

"I will try very hard to be more than just good enough for you," Harry answered back.

"Mornarth will be teaching your mate what he needs to know each morning. While that happens, it would be best if I shared my memories of life in the Weyr."

Harry nodded at the ancient Horntail. Dobby watched for a moment longer then he vanished. When he returned he brought a small desk and chair along with parchment and quills. "Harry Potter will need to take notes when he learns," the little elf said.

Harry blinked, then grinned at his friend. "Thank you, Dobby." He arranged himself at the desk and looked over to Spath, who seemed to understand his need for the writing implements.

Nodding to Spath, he dipped his quill into the ink.

"There is much that has changed about our lives, but in some ways we are still the same," began Spath.

Headmaster's Office, Hogwarts, November 16th, early morning...

"Thank you, Solly," Albus murmured, taking the potion from the little elf. He uncorked the bottle and was just about to drink from it when another knock interrupted his morning.

"Now what?" he muttered. He had just finished up with Minerva, Poppy and Severus and now here was another distraction. He glanced down at the headache potion in his hand with regret and he placed it to one side of his desk. "Come!" he called.

The door opened admitting Minister Fudge, Lucius Malfoy and Amelia Bones, who looked decidedly uncomfortable with the company she was keeping.

"Minister Fudge, what a pleasant surprise. Please, be seated," Albus said with a smile.

Fudge sat in a chair scowling at the Headmaster, "Just what are you doing to us, Dumbledore? You've let this tournament turn Britain into the laughing stock of the world! First you force Potter to compete, then you let him steal an entire reserve's worth of dragons!"

Fudge trailed off as Dumbledore slowly stood, clearly angry enough to let his tight control on his magic slip. "Minister," he said through

gritted teeth, "your own people lied to me about a magical contract. I only made Mister Potter participate because I thought I was protecting his magic. Harry has left Hogwarts, He went with the dragons who, I assure you, will see that he is well cared for. He discovered yesterday that dragons are not the mindless beasts we thought them to be."

"Oh, really, Dumbledore! You've clearly slipped into your dotage if you are going to think that dragons have some sort of intelligence. Why, even if that were true, they couldn't be even half as smart as a house elf!" exclaimed Malfoy.

Dumbledore drew himself up to his full height. "This coming from a man that was bested by his own former house elf two years ago?" he asked with a hint of a sneer.

"Enough!" snapped Amelia, "We have enough problems right now without this fight."

She turned to Dumbledore. "Albus, what you don't know is that besides the one single reserve that has lost all of its dragons, nearly every other reserve in the world is in total disarray. We have had reports of dragon handlers abandoning the reserves entirely. Thankfully, there have been no deaths, but there have been hundreds of casualties."

Albus stood and walked over to his pensieve. He carefully removed and placed it in the bowl.

"This is my memory of the task from just prior to when Harry Potter emerged from the tent to the point where a Ministry employee admits to conspiring to force Harry Potter into the tournament. You might find it illuminating."

He let it play out and silently watched his three guests. Malfoy nearly had a heart attack seeing the shade of Voldemort destroyed. Fudge looked ill and Amelia looked ready to spit nails. He had no doubt that Ludo Bagman and Barty Crouch would soon be undergoing an interrogation at the DMLE.

When the scenes finished playing he returned the memory to his mind and turned to face the three. "You'll note that the dragons acted in concert, a behavior which we have never seen before.

You'll also note a senior member of the Fudge Administration who confessed to me that he conspired with another senior member of government to force Harry Potter into the tournament for the publicity he would bring the tournament.

"I cannot say what is happening at the dragon reserves. However, if you assume they are mindless beasts, then nothing Harry Potter did in that stadium yesterday resulted in what is happening at the reserves. On the other hand, if you are willing to believe that they are not mindless beasts, and perhaps have a way of communicating with each other, then perhaps what happened to Harry involved all dragon kind."

Fudge shook his head stubbornly. "Impossible! They are beasts. They have always been beasts. I know what your heading towards, Dumbledore, and I won't stand for it. If the Ministries of the world agree they are as smart as house elves, then they would fall under the ICW Intelligent Species Protection Act. That would bankrupt us! Not to mention all of the potions we'd lose until substitutes could be found for the ingredients!"

"Minister," Malfoy said smoothly, "do not worry yourself. The Ministries would never make such a decision. We have only one small reserve, but other countries have many. The impact on the world economy would be greater on them than us."

Dumbledore shrugged. "Then do not blame Harry Potter for your problems. If they are beasts, nothing he did yesterday could affect reserves on the other side of the world."

Both Malfoy and Fudge looked sour at that declaration.

"I think we're getting far afield from our original intent for this visit. It's clear to me that Harry Potter was not entirely in charge of his faculties yesterday. Whatever happened with the dragons is not my concern. What is my concern is that two members of government committed a crime that resulted in a young wizard becoming willing to voluntarily give up his magic," Amelia said hotly, overriding the men arguing.

"It also didn't escape my notice that Harry walked out into that arena, his wand pocketed. He approached the dragon in a manner which clearly suggested that the only goal he had on his mind was suicide.

If it weren't for the fortuitous hatching of that baby dragon, we would undoubtedly be discussing the death of an icon that our society can ill afford to lose."

Dumbledore blushed with shame and nodded. "Yes, Amelia that is true. For many years now, since my predecessor to be exact, Hogwarts has survived without using its code of conduct for the students. The Board of Governors at the time felt that the code of conduct was too old fashioned and demeaning to pure bloods, because it insisted that all students were to be treated equally."

Albus shot her and Malfoy an angry glare. "Thanks to that board, we have been unable to implement a new code of conduct or to return to the old one. Five times in the past ten years, as both you and Mister Malfoy can attest, I have presented an updated code to the board and it's been rejected.

"Yesterday, after Mister Potter left, I invoked Article 1 of the Hogwarts charter which states that the Headmaster can override and disband the Board of Governors if he ever finds the board to be working against the best interests of the school. Then I invoked the original code of conduct upon which this school was founded."

"You can't!" exclaimed Malfoy.

"I can and I have! And I have already warned your offspring, Mister Malfoy. One more transgression and I will personally snap his wand and bind his core!" Dumbledore shot back. "It was due entirely to the behavior of this school that we saw a student attempt suicide in front of the world press!"

Amelia pressed a hand to her forehead. The meeting was not going like she had expected it to. "Albus," she said softly, "don't you think you should have warned the board that you were considering such a move?"

She trailed off and cringed back from his glare, more than a little fearful. A small aura played about the Headmaster.

"You've had your chances. I have to live with the shame of not doing enough. But you? You have to live with the shame of doing nothing! Meanwhile, the greatest symbol of hope our society has seen in decades has left our school and I daresay he will never return.

Merlin forgive me, but I will have to live with that image of Harry Potter walking up to a dragon hoping for a quick death, and so will each of you."

Malfoy tightly gripped his cane in one hand and his other hand twitched.

"Lucius, you can't beat me," Albus said softly. "You couldn't beat me when you hid behind your mask and your Master and you can't beat me now. Do not try me because I no longer have the patience I once did."

"I think we've done enough for today," Amelia said placatingly. "The world press is already calling for an investigation. I will have a small Auror team arrive later today to look into the tournament."

Albus nodded. He had expected such.

Fudge looked at Amelia in outrage, but Lucius leaned over and whispered something to the man which seemed to calm him, Nodding, he stood and Lucius followed him.

Amelia glanced at the pair and stood as well.

"Dumbledore," Fudge said curtly, then he turned to head to the door. At the door, he turned back to the Headmaster. "If I find out you had something to do with the loss of my cows this morning, Albus, I'll break you!" he snarled, then he exited the office.

Albus watched their retreating backs for a moment longer, then he reached for his headache potion. Cows? He mused. What did he mean by that?

Hogwarts Infirmary, Mid Morning, November 16th...

"I got your message, Poppy," Minerva said from the doorway of her office.

Poppy waved her friend in. "I just wanted to tell you that one of yours came to me today. She's in bed six, the one behind the curtains."

Minerva sat down and eyed her friend for a moment. "Miss Granger?"

Poppy nodded.

"What's wrong with her?"

Poppy sighed. "I would wish it was a disease or an injury that I could easily treat, but I'm afraid it's nothing so simple. Miss Granger is suffering from the realization that her actions played a part in what happened to Mister Potter yesterday. She is suffering from both a sense of guilt and the loss of her best friend. She came in her distraught, with her magic flaring wildly. I had to give her a heavy dose of calming draught just so she could gain control of her magic."

Minerva sighed and shook her head sadly. "I wish it weren't the case, but a great many of my lions could use the same calming draught."

"Perhaps you could talk to her, Minerva?" asked Poppy.

Minerva nodded unhappily and stood, then she left the office and walked over to the curtained off bed. Slipping around the barrier, she found Hermione laying on her side, her arms wrapped tightly around herself and her face streaked with tears.

"Hermione?" she said gently, then she moved to sit in her field of view. "Hermione, I know you're hurting now, but even Harry knows you didn't intend to deliberately hurt him."

Hermione turned to look at the teacher she admired the most. "I know," she whispered. "But whatever the intent, I knew he was in trouble and he was hurting and I ignored his pain. He had no plan yesterday, Professor. I let my best friend down and now he's gone. I don't know if I'll ever see him again, or even if he's all right."

Minerva smiled sadly. "I know child, but I also know that he's not completely alone. The Headmaster has determined that Dobby has followed Harry wherever he went. That elf will see that Harry's taken care of. You know how dedicated Dobby is to Harry's welfare."

Hermione nodded, feeling a bit relieved knowing that Dobby would help Harry, but it did little to relieve her own crushing sense of guilt.

"Rest today, Hermione," Minerva said. "Tomorrow will come soon enough and no one really knows what the future may bring. You may yet see your friend again."

"I hope so," Hermione whispered fervently.

Minerva patted her hand and turned to go back to Poppy. She was saddened to see Hermione reacting so badly but she wasn't the only one feeling guilty for what had happened.

"How is she?" asked Poppy.

"As one would expect," Minerva replied unhappily. "She's realized that she helped drive Mister Potter away. She knows she hurt him and she feels guilty for it."

Poppy tutted and shook her head.

Disko Island Weyr, Greenland, Mid day, November 16th...

Harry looked away from Spath, breaking the connection they had shared for over an hour. He spotted the reason for his distraction and he smiled, seeing Fawkes sitting atop a large trunk.

"A fire bird!" exclaimed Chekiath. He turned away from Momnarth and trotted over to Harry.

"Hullo, Fawkes," he said, greeting the large bird. Fawkes trilled loudly and Harry shook when several nearby dragons took up a counter point to Fawkes' song. The dragons may have lacked the magic of Fawkes' singing, but it was still a stirring and powerful sound.

He looked around at the dozen or so dragons that were nearby, sitting on the rocks sunning themselves. "That was wonderful. Thank you," he said breathlessly.

Chekiath stopped next to Harry and stared at Fawkes in fascination, his eyes twirling with interest. Harry reached out and stroked his dragon and Chekiath snuffled with pleasure, then he leaned heavily against his hand.

"Fawkes, I'd like you to meet Chekiath, my dragon," he said softly. "Cheki, this is Fawkes, he is a phoenix who saved my life once."

"Thank you for saving my rider, Fire Bird," Chekiath said politely. "Welcome to our weyr."

Fawkes gave a startled squawk and turned to stare at the little dragon who just spoke to his mind. The phoenix had experienced dragons many times in his very long life, but this was the first time he had ever had one speak to him. Fawkes suddenly spread his wings and flashed to flame. Instead of vanishing as he usually did, he began to sing.

The magic present in the Phoenix song was much stronger in this form and all the dragons of the weyr turned to listen. Fawkes spoke to them not in a language of words, but a language of emotions and concepts. His song was of surprise and a wondrous joy to have met an intelligence he hadn't encountered before. The impact of his song was immense as the dragons took up a crooning reply.

Harry staggered over to his chair and even Dobby sat limply on the floor, stunned by the feelings Fawkes expressed.

Fawkes looked hard at Chekiath and it seemed a message passed between them before he flamed out to return to Hogwarts.

"Merlin," Harry said, clearly shaken by the incident. Chekiath came over to him and gently laid his large head in Harry's lap.

"The Fire Bird told me to take good care of you. He said he knew you were special, but I already knew you were special." Cheki's jaw dropped open in what could only be described as a grin. "And you're all mine."

Harry laughed and stroked his dragon.

"Harry Potter, sir? There is a letter for you attached to the trunk Fawkes brought."

Harry looked interested and he reached out a hand. The letter flew out of Dobby's hand and landed in his. He stared at the letter in consternation and Dobby clapped his hands. "Dobby knew Harry

Potter was a powerful wizard! Only the most powerful can do magic without a wand."

Dobby smiled at the young master's astounded expression. Then the smile slipped away and he looked at the boy sternly. "Harry Potter must practice every day to become better with wandless magic."

Harry nodded. "Right, another thing to add to my list of things to do," he grumbled to himself. Shaking his head, he broke the seal on the letter and began to read.

Harry, old boy,

I'm hurt! You zip off on an adventure and you don't ask your old Godfather if he wants to tag along?

But seriously, Remus and I are worried about you. Dumbledore asked us to put together a package of books for you to read. Boring, I know, but you're going to need at least some of this stuff.

I don't know what you did, but Dumbledore seems to have taken it to heart. He sent Fawkes here to raid my family library, and that was after he raided Hogwarts! The trunk was half full when it arrived with Fawkes.

Remus and I are concerned, Harry. We don't know exactly what drove you to leave school, but we do know that you're out there somewhere by yourself. If you think where you are at is safe from Aurors, then let me know and I'll get there as fast as I can, and I'll bring wolfie along for the ride.

Padfoot.

He turned to Spath. "Would it be alright with you if I asked some friends to join us?"

"Rider, you are Weyrleader. You decide who can enter the Weyr and who can not," Spath said with amusement in his voice. It seemed that while he had a vision of what the Weyrleader was supposed to be like, his Weyrleader was young and unused to commanding. It would take some time for him to come to accept his role.

Nodding to himself, he quickly wrote up a short note, then he turned to the elf.

"Dobby, do you remember Professor Lupin from last year?"

Dobby nodded and looked eagerly at Harry.

"Do you think you can find him?"

Again Dobby nodded. Harry smiled and held out a note. "Good. Take this to Professor Lupin, then wait and help them in any way possible. When they're ready, bring them here."

Dobby clutched at the note and vanished with a snap of his fingers.

"Momnarth says that in two weeks you and I will begin flight training, Harry. Not long after that, we'll be able to fly together. Soon, we can travel to get your friends," Chekiath said wistfully.

Harry smiled at his dragon and scratched around his ears. "I can't wait for us to fly. When I flew on Momnarth it was great, but I know it will be even better with you. We have so much to do Cheki and I can't do it without your help."

Chekiath looked up at Harry, his eyes twirling slowly at his rider. He was content, he had his rider and together they would shape the Weys of Earth.

Spath rumbled in approval at the pair, then another dragon landed nearby. Harry blinked and looked at the dragon, a Norwegian Ridgeback, who looked...

"Norbet?" he whispered in surprise.

The Ridgeback turned to Harry. "You remember me? My real name is Selanth."

"Yes! Yes, I do. I was one of the students who smuggled you out of the school so that they wouldn't kill you and put Hagrid in prison."

"Hagrid," Selanth said softly, as if tasting the name. "I never could quite hear his name and I don't think he could hear me."

"You impressed?" Harry blurted.

"Only partially," Selanth replied sadly.

Harry looked to Spath for an explanation.

"I am not sure of all of the details, Weyrleader, but Selanth reached out and touched this Hagrid like Chekiath touched you. Instead of the normal connection being made, Selanth got a very muffled reply from the man. It was nearly impossible for Selanth to hear him. It was almost as if his mind was hidden behind a thick wall. I think that because the impression was incomplete, it couldn't reawaken our memories like your impression did."

Harry nodded thoughtfully. "I like Hagrid and think he's a kindhearted person, but given his size, I'm not sure he's entirely human. I think there's some giant in his background somewhere."

He turned back to Selanth. "If I could convince Hagrid to join us, would you like that?"

Selanth's eyes twirled in anticipation. "Our bond exists, but it wasn't formed correctly. If he could come here, it may continue to form until it's completed. Despite only a partial connection, I feel incomplete without him."

Harry nodded and reached for some parchment. "Right, then. As Hermione would say, it's time to make a list of things that have to be done."

"Thank you, Weyrleader," Selanth said, her voice tinged with hope.

Harry smiled at the dragon. "You're welcome, Selanth. But if I understand Spath properly, it's my job to take care of you. Your rider is missing and we'll bring him home to you."

Around the bowl, five hundred and three dragons hummed in approval and many bespoke to Chekiath, congratulating him on picking such a fine rider and Weyrleader.

The little dragon lay near Harry, watching him scribble on his parchment and hummed contentedly. Yes, Harry was special, and he was his.

Spath watched Harry for a moment longer, then he turned to eye Momnarth who he sensed was uneasy about something. "What troubles you?"

Momnarth relayed the images of just after the impression and the shade that was ejected from Harry's forehead.

Spath's eyes twirled in distress. "It is troubling. How such a thing is possible, I do not know. You sensed the evil and must pass that to the others. We shall all watch for such evil in the future. If we find it, we will destroy it."

Momnarth relaxed at Spath's pronouncement. The Weyrleader was no longer affected by the evil spirit, but there might be others out there. If the Weyrleader worked to protect the Weyr, then they would work to protect their Weyrleader.

It is an unusual feeling to be told that what you know is wrong. Thus, when the knowledge of the true nature of Dragons came to light, it was no wonder that the Wizards rebelled against the idea, pitting themselves against another intelligent species. Dragons were an economic resource that man was reluctant to give up without a fight.

Excerpted from The Weyrs of Earth by Remus John Lupin, published 2040.

Authors Notes:

+ Publication of chapters should be roughly one chapter a week unless something changes.

+ Dragon abilities have been altered to allow them to fit better with the story. This is AU folks, if you don't like the changes from dragon lore, or from Harry Potter, don't whine to me, instead go read canon.

+ No Horcruxes, no Hallows in this story. There was some magic used by Voldemort in his quest for immortality, but Horcruxes don't exist in this. What existed in Harry was a parasitic power leech that funneled power to Voldemort's shade. It was semi-sentient in itself.

Standard Disclaimer:

Bob hummed happily and placed a few sugar free marshmallows on the end of a stick, then he held the stick up and a jet of fire shot across the stage engulfing the stick.

He looked at the stick and noted that the end with the marshmallows had been vaporized. He frowned. "Too hot!" he declared.

"What are you doing, and why is there a dragon sitting in the wings?" asked Alyx.

Bob shook his head and prepared another stick, then held it up. Once again the jet of fire came and incinerated the stick and marshmallows.

"Still too hot," he muttered, then he turned to look at Alyx.

"Did you know that a dragon can precisely control his flame, from hot enough to vaporize steel to a gentle warming for your coffee?"

Alyx glared at him. "I read about that somewhere so yes."

Chekiath stuck his huge head out from behind the curtain and bathed Alyx's butt in dragon fire.

She whirled around but he had already pulled back out of sight.

"What are you up too?" she demanded of Bob.

"I thought you'd like to give the disclaimer for this chapter," He answered smoothly.

"But its your story!" she protested.

"True, but you owe me for that prank you pulled, ruining my tux." Bob countered.

"Oh very well," Alyx pouted, then she turned to the audience while Bob walked away.

"We don't own Harry Potter, we don't own the Dragon Riders of Pern. We're just playing in that sandbox for a bit."

Alyx smiled and turned away revealing the seat of her pants had been burned away. And on her right butt cheek was a tattoo that read "Contents under pressure! Explosion Danger!"

Bob smiled. "Seems only fair, last week she ruined my tux. Enjoy the chapter folks."

The early history of dragons is unknown. If one takes into account the ideas of the muggle Charles Darwin, who believes that all creatures came from more primitive variations of themselves, then we could easily postulate the possibility of dragons arising out of simpler non-magical animals. One possible ancestor of dragons could be the famous Komodo Dragon, which even the muggles know about.

Excerpt from *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find them* by Newt Scamander, published 1927.

#12 Grimmauld Place, Mid Day, November 16th...

Remus sat down and poured himself a cup of tea. The house was quiet for the moment, with Padfoot upstairs tending to Buckbeak. They had plans to send Buckbeak to a reserve in France, thanks to a contact of Dumbledore's.

A small pop signified the arrival of an elf he knew rather well from his time at Hogwarts.

"Dobby? What are you doing here?"

"Professor Lupin sir, I brings a note from Harry Potter."

Remus sat up quickly and took the offered note. Reading quickly, his brow furrowed. It was short and very much to the point.

Sirius walked in and stopped short. "Moony, who's the elf?"

"That's Dobby," Moony replied absently. "Harry freed him from Malfoy in his second year."

Sirius sat and looked at the elf that smiled warily at the shaggy man. Dobby knew that Sirius Black was a wanted man, but he trusted

Harry Potter and knew that if Harry believed in Sirius, then he should too.

"You're from Harry?" asked Sirius intently.

Dobby nodded and stepped a little closer to Moony.

"Is he all right? He's really with dragons?"

Dobby nodded again. "Harry Potter is well. Dobby stole him a bed, and evil Snapies chair and desk so he has something to sleep on and somewhere to sit. It wasn't good for Harry Potter to sleep on the stones."

Sirius thought for a moment, then he reached for a blank parchment laying on a nearby counter. "Dobby," he said absently, "I want you to take this note to Gringotts, then bring back what they give you. We'll figure out from there what else we need to do."

He quickly finished scribbling his note, then he pressed his signet ring against the parchment. The ring had been among the many missing items he had discovered in his mother's jewelry box. She'd taken the ring from him when he had been kicked from the home. Apparently, she'd never gotten around to giving it to Regulus, his brother.

Dobby took the note and vanished with a pop.

"What was that all about?" Remus asked.

Sirius scratched at his scalp and looked down. "Look at what we know, Remus. Harry is with dragons, and until a house elf intervened, he had planned to sleeping on some stones. I don't know what kind of problems Harry has, but I do know that one way to solve problems is to throw money at them. I sent Dobby to get us 20,000 galleons from Gringotts."

Moony looked thoughtful for a long minute. "It makes sense," he said slowly, then he smiled. "Evil Snapies desk and chair?"

"We never stole Snape's desk and chair," Sirius said ruefully. "But Harry really didn't either. Dobby did. We need to help Harry realize his prank potential, Moony!"

Remus rolled his eyes and wondered if his friend would ever grow up.

Gringotts Executive, London...

"Report."

The small Goblin bowed and looked around nervously. "We have confirmed from our sources abroad that at least three dragon reserves have been abandoned by the Wizards. There are tales of Ministries mounting full blown assaults on some reserves and suffering heavy casualties. The rumor out of Hogwarts is that dragons have an intelligence and a way of communicating with each other that we cannot detect.

"The Ministry's position on the matter is emphatic and, for once, in agreement with our own. Dragons are mindless beasts. Last I heard, they were planning to send a large force of aurors, unspeakables and dragon handlers to the Shetland Island Reserve."

Ragnok leaned forward in his seat. "And do your rumors explain the reasoning behind this calamity?"

The terrified Goblin shook his head. "Some people at the Ministry are claiming it's due to something that Harry Potter did at the tournament yesterday, but no one knows for certain."

Ragnok snarled at a guard. "Get him out of here!"

Two guards stepped forward the goblin squeaked. One shoved him hard and he fell to the floor. Another grabbed him by the ankle and started to drag him out.

Ragnok waited until the disturbance was cleared away, then turned to his second. "Well?"

Gapsit shuffled some parchments, then he looked up at the assembled Executive Council. "As you are aware, we maintain two primary herds of Dragons. The one herd we breed for

aggressiveness. That herd is dedicated entirely to providing vault security and brings us a tidy profit every month. It's also the smaller of the two herds, numbering less than 50 beasts in all.

"Behavior in that herd is almost normal. The dragons appear restless and agitated but our handlers have had no problems managing them.

"Our other herd is the second largest in Britain and nearly rivals the Shetland Island reserve in size. Before this started, the census placed that herd at 257 adults, and 23 juvenile dragons. Yesterday, six of the adults were scheduled for culling so that we can maintain our contractual obligations of potion stock deliveries. All six dragons scheduled to be culled vanished as soon as we moved them into the processing chamber.

"On my order, two more dragons were selected at random and moved into the processing chamber. Those two also vanished before we could put them down. Given that a total of 8 dragons have vanished and we have no idea how they managed it, I felt it necessary to halt all culling until we can figure out what is happening.

"Research is working on the problem and are applying all sorts of wards to the processing chamber. It's unclear how successful they will be, but they won't finish applying all the wards they know of for another week."

"How will this affect us?" asked Grognot, head of the Glasgow Gringotts Clan.

"In the short term, we're looking at defaulting on three supply contracts. Long term, if processing cannot continue, the impact is more profound. Our herd supplies the bulk of the heartstrings and potion stocks for Great Britain and some hide products. This portion of our business accounts for 6.5% of our bottom line. However, if we are forced to factor in maintaining the herd without processing, then the numbers rise to 10.6%."

The senior goblins growled at the news and Ragnok banged a hammer against the table to restore order.

"This is a priority. We are to find out what happened to cause this and how to prevent the loss of our livestock," he snarled. "The

position of Gringotts is simple. Dragons are beasts and we will protect our herd."

Gapsit acknowledged the command. "I will order our Research department to redouble their efforts and put Security into investigating this tournament, just on the off chance that its related."

Ragnok nodded, clearly unhappy, but there was little they could do for now.

Ministry of Magic, DMLE Interrogation Room 2...

Amelia stopped outside of the room and accepted the parchment that had been handed to her. She quickly scanned the information and scowled.

"Is he sure of this?"

"Yes, ma'am. The healer is pretty certain the subject is under several forms of mind control, including an Imperius curse."

"Damn," Amelia swore. "Very well. I'll talk with Ludo Bagman while the healer works on Crouch. Hopefully we'll be able to get some information out of him on who did it."

The Auror nodded and turned to walk away.

She took a deep breath and entered the room. The case had become more sinister and they were faced with the distinct possibility of it crashing to a halt, as so few controlled subjects remembered their controller.

Steeling herself and putting on her game face she passed the curtain that separated her from other part of the room. Ludo Bagman sat nervously on a chair at the small table.

"Amelia, I..."

He stopped when she held up a hand.

She sat across the table from him and opened up a thick file. "Ludo Bagman," she murmured after a moment. "Accused of conspiring to pass information to a known Death Eater, exonerated by virtue of

the fact that no one could believe that you would associate with those types.

"Addicted to gambling and currently wanted by no less than three Goblin clans for failing to pay gambling debts. According to your record, for the past ten years, you've dabbled in a number of shady schemes that skirt the hairy edges of the law, usually in an attempt to raise cash to pay off numerous debts.

"My own department has been investigating your behavior since just prior to the World Cup, when we learned that you accepted extra money from one of the concessionary firms that sold beer and soft drinks at the event."

Ludo's eyes bulged and he started to perspire heavily. "I can explain all that, honestly!" he exclaimed.

"What I am more interested in hearing, Ludo," Amelia replied softly, "is the tale of how you agreed to force a fourteen year old wizard into a dangerous competition that resulted in him withdrawing from Hogwarts. When the common witch and wizard learn that their hero has been forced from the school, they will want your head on a pike. Coming clean now just might prevent all that unpleasantness down the road."

"Me? Why, I would never!" he exclaimed.

Amelia pinned him with her gaze. "Oh, come now, Ludo! I have seen the Pensieve memory of Albus Dumbledore in which you confessed to helping Barty Crouch enter Harry Potter in the tournament illegally."

While Pensieve memories were not admissible in a court of law, they were an accepted investigative tool that helped point law enforcement in the right direction.

Ludo shuddered. He hadn't known that Dumbledore had shared that particular indiscretion of his. He never meant to admit such a thing to anyone, but Dumbledore frightened him and when he was frightened, he tended to blurt out things he shouldn't. Now he was in big trouble. Amelia would simply get a magistrate to sign an order to give him Veritaserum. And with the memory, they could ask the right questions.

Ludo crumpled in his seat and tears started to flow down his cheeks. "What do you wish to know?" he whispered.

Amelia smiled thinly, then she waved her wand once, emitting a soft tone. The curtain parted and a DMLE transcriptionist entered and set up a dicta quill. She was followed by another auror, who stood just inside the curtain and was there as a witness.

The transcriptionist nodded to Amelia a moment later, then stood to one side. It was her job to ensure the quill was accurate and she would later see to entering these records as evidence to the court.

Amelia glanced at a wall clock then turned back to Ludo. "It is now 13:03 on November 16th and I am Amelia Bones, chief investigator and department head for the Department of Magical Law Enforcement. This is the interview of Bagman, Ludovic, former head of the Department of Games and Sports.

"Now, Mister Bagman, let's start at the point where you first decided that Harry Potter should be entered into the tournament."

Ludo nodded unhappily. He could lie, but it would do him no good. If this went to trial, the court would order Veritaserum for his testimony and any lies told now would be exposed. All he could do was tell the truth and hope for the best.

Disko Island Weyr, Greenland, Early Evening, November 16th...

A small pop signaled Dobby's arrival and Harry was greatly relieved. The little elf had been gone almost all day and he had been getting worried.

"Dobby!" he exclaimed.

Dobby smiled shyly, then looked around. He was levitating a large number of boxes. "Dobby is sorry he is late Harry Potter sir, but your wolfie and dogfather had a great many things for Dobby to do. I will bring them in once I set these down."

He moved the boxes to a corner and then vanished again.

Harry shook his head and glanced over at Chekiath, who seemed to be rumbling with amusement.

"He is an excitable little fellow," Chekiath observed. "And he cares for you very much, Harry. I'm glad you told me not to eat him. Don't tell him I said this, but he still looks tasty."

Harry grinned. "I'm glad too, Cheki. I'm certain that dinner is in one of those boxes he brought." Chekiath might be telling the truth, but when the dragon memories were awakened, thinking creatures immediately fell off their list of things to eat.

Dobby appeared with two more people and Chekiath was immediately up and moving to Harry's side.

"Easy, Cheki," Harry murmured. "These are very good friends of mine."

Chekiath looked up at Harry. "They don't smell like humans. This one," he said, pointing his muzzle towards Sirius, "smells like a Smelly Dog, and the other smells of Wolf."

Harry blinked at the little dragon, then he bent over with laughter, causing Sirius and Remus to grin.

"What's the joke?" asked Sirius.

Harry looked up at the pair and returned their grin. "Chekiath tells me that you two don't smell like humans," he replied, then he pointed at Remus. "You smell like a Wolf, and Sirius like a smelly dog."

Remus merely shrugged, but Sirius began to protest.

"So, we come all the way out here just to find ourselves... Wait. Where are we?"

"You are here," replied Chekiath. "You can't be any other place than here, Smelly Dog. If you were someplace else, you wouldn't be here."

Harry collapsed to the ground in laughter and both men stared at the dragon in amazement.

"That went right through my occlumency shields," exclaimed Sirius.

Remus shook his head, still marveling at the fact that Sirius had learned occlumency at all. Chekiath's voice had slipped past his protections, but his were of an entirely different nature. The mind of a werewolf was protected by the insanity and rage of the beast.

Harry stood and dusted himself off, still chuckling. "I'm not sure what the name of this place is. We arrived here from the task. Spath calls this an ancient Weyr, one of the first, used as a refuge by the dragons in times of trouble."

"Weyr," Remus repeated, testing the word out. "It's a strange word."

"It's where we live," Chekiath replied.

Sirius started again and he looked at the little dragon in surprise. "Now he's doing it just because he knows it startles me."

Chekiath's eyes twirled in amusement.

"Let's go out to the bowl and I'll call in some of the others and introduce you to them. It's late and I don't expect to get much done tonight."

"Probably a good idea," Remus agreed. "Dobby has a bunch of things in the boxes that need to be unpacked and set up. We'd only be in the way."

Harry nodded and waved them towards the exit of the small cave. Both men came to the exit and skidded to a halt at the sight of so many dragons. Almost as one, every dragon turned to face the newcomers.

"Friends," Harry said out loud. "This is my godfather and his best friend. They were best friends of my parents."

Spath moved from his own cave down to the spot where Harry stood. "Weyrleader, you know that one of these men is dangerous?"

"He is, but it's only because as a child he was bitten by a werewolf. He is one of the best people I know, who happens to suffer cruelly through no fault of his own."

Spath turned away from Harry and eyed the two men for a moment, his eyes twirling slowly.

Remus' eyes were misty from Harry's comment. It always amazed him when someone was so openly accepting of him.

"The Weyrleader's family is welcome to our Weyr. Welcome, Wolf and Smelly Dog."

The Dragon History, Volume One, The Queen who jumped...

Remus stepped out of the wizarding tent and stretched. A layer of snow had dropped in the night but the heat of the rocks was quickly melting it away. Around the rim of the bowl sat dozens of dragons sunning themselves. A few picked at the herd that was slowly dwindling in the center of the bowl.

The night before, Harry had explained impressing Chekiath and Remus had been profoundly grateful to the little dragon who had managed to save Harry from his own self destructive course. He had also explained dragons and what his impression had done to them. It was clear to Remus that much of that story was still to be told and he wanted to get to the bottom of it.

History was one of his favorite subjects, and while he knew he could never impress a dragon, he was determined to aid them and Harry.

"Good morning, Spath," Remus called when he spotted the ancient dragon emerging from his cave.

The old dragon turned to face him. Once the dragons had learned of Remus' affliction and of his devotion to Harry, they had settled down and quickly came to accept the man.

"Hello, Wolf," replied Spath.

Remus smiled at that. The dragons seemed to be reluctant to use proper names for people. Chekiath used Harry's name, but every other dragon called him Weyrleader. For Sirius and Remus, they'd

settled on descriptive names instead. Wolf wasn't as bad as what Spath called Sirius. He laughed quite a lot when Sirius learned the dragons called him "Smelly Dog".

"I'm curious about that first queen and where you came from, Spath. The past is something of a passion of mine and if you would explain it to me, I'll record the information so that we can explain it to others who come to the Weyr."

"Sit, Wolf, and I will tell you as much as I remember," Spath said.

Remus took a seat on the rocks and was grateful for the warmth provided by the nearby hot springs.

"When we were created, we were changed from what we had been into something new. Our world had evolved to deal with a deadly enemy and we were able to live our lives, simple and free. Then man came to our world.

"For a time, he prospered. But then thread spun out again as it was wont to do and Man was in trouble. The great ships in the skies, what we called the Dawn Sisters, had no way of contacting the home world. Even if they could have, it would have taken too long for help to arrive."

As the dragon spoke, Remus found himself drawn into the imagery, almost like a pensieve memory. Suddenly, he found himself in the lower section of a great bowl. It looked like it was from an ancient volcano long extinct.

Around him people and dragons worked and talked. He looked up and was surprised to see a sun that didn't quite look right. It wasn't the usual size or color. It was close but different enough for him to notice it.

"Ho! Fara!" shouted a voice.

He turned to see a man wave and a young, handsome woman smile in return, then she handed some material to another woman before turning to meet the caller. She was of medium height, slim of build with a bright smile. Remus knew just by looking that here was a woman who enjoyed life.

Remus felt drawn to follow her.

"Fara, have you spoken to H'lok about the weyrlings yet? He was interested in finding out what you thought about young Juni and Moranth."

"I spoke to him this morn before he took the senior weyrlings off for firestone practice. I agree. Moranth needs another month before she rises for the first time," Fara replied.

The man nodded and glanced up towards the star stones at the edge of the bowl. "Good. According to the last sighting, fall is due to begin in two turns. We're going to need the infusion of dragons that Moranth will bring."

Fara smirked. "And the fact that you might get to break in another Queen's Rider will be a nice wherry feather in your cap, M'Lan."

He chuckled and leered at her. "You didn't complain at the time, Fara, nor any time afterwards."

A wherry screamed and they both turned to watch Sidraneth take down her fourth wherry of the morning.

M'Lan eyed the gravid queen in admiration. "She's efficient and still flying well. I hear the lower caverns are wagering 80 or more eggs from her laying."

Fara nodded and eyed her dragon affectionately. The large queen was close to her time to clutch and her belly bulged with eggs.

A scream ripped through the air and both humans looked up in alarm. A bronze was wheeling around the bowl in obvious distress. One wing smoked ominously and the rider seemed to be badly injured but still able to cling to his dragon.

"The Weyrling practice! There must have had an accident!" she gasped, then turned and ran for her Weyrhealer kit.

The injured bronze bellowed in pain again and there was a visible ripping along its wing sails as the wing came apart. Gravely injured, the dragon lost all lift and plunged to the ground, right where Fara was standing with her kit. She never had a chance, it was so sudden.

All sound in the Weyr ceased and every eye turned to the sight.

Sidraneth, Fara's queen, bellowed in anguish and the entire Weyr's dragon population began to keen, as the gold dragon sprang aloft and blinked from existence.

Remus suddenly found himself sitting on the stones, staring at Spath, his face streaked with tears. That poor woman, he thought. To die so tragically. Here one moment, gone the next.

"A dragon cannot live without its rider, Wolf," Spath said quietly in his mind. "Sidraneth thought she was jumping into the long silent sleep of death. Instead, she came here."

Remus stood and he bowed to the ancient dragon. "You have honored me with your tale, but for me to hear more at this point would be too much. I will write this history up for all to read, and when I am done, if you will permit, we will continue with your tale?"

Spath nodded. "It will be as you say, Wolf."

Hogwarts Great Hall, Breakfast, November 17th...

The Gryffindor table had been subdued for the past two days and it didn't look like that was going to change today. The 'Golden Trio' had fractured. The two remaining refused to speak to each other. In their pain and guilt, each blamed the other for the breakup, which only added to the stress their house was subjected to.

The morning's event would only increase the stress levels at the school as the morning mail deliveries started to arrive. Among the deliveries was the Daily Prophet.

Tournament Organizer Under Imperius

The Department of Magical Law Enforcement announced that they were bringing charges against Ludovic Bagman for conspiracy to endanger an underage wizard. In a statement from the DMLE press office, they explained that Barty Crouch had been placed under an Imperius curse and compelled to force Harry Potter to compete in the tournament. Bagman, agreed to go along with the scheme, as he had several illegal bets riding on the tournament and Harry Potter.

It was unclear how the Goblet came to be enchanted to pick Potter. Neither of the men admitting to the spells, leading the DMLE to believe a third party had been also participating, Most likely this person was also responsible for controlling Barty Crouch.

The scheme unraveled two days ago when Harry Potter failed to complete the first task. Potter, age fourteen, made a claim that the dragons were intelligent and he attacked the dragon handlers who were only trying to save Potter from the dangerous animal.

A spokesman for the office of the Minister of Magic said that Potter's claims were outrageous and in all likelihood the poor boy had been driven mad by the pressure put upon him by an uncaring school staff and a cruel student body.

When questioned about the number of dragons that were present, and the fact that Harry Potter left the task at Hogwarts in the company of the dragons, the Ministry has offered no comment.

What is known is that Harry Potter has left the school and is no longer attending classes. Rumors from various sources claim that the student body had been putting considerable pressure on Potter in recent weeks, even going as far as publicly slandering his character with small buttons proclaiming "Potter Stinks". Why the staff of the school allowed such behavior is unknown.

Headmaster Albus Dumbledore was quoted as saying, "What happened to Mister Potter was a result of multiple factors. For years now the Board of Governors felt that they knew more than our school's founders and refused to allow me to enforce the student code of conduct, which has existed since the day the school first opened. Harry Potter being hounded from this school, and perhaps from our world, is one result of the Board's action.

"I have taken steps to see that this does not happen again. Regretfully, I fear it is too late to help Mister Potter."

What is known for certain is that Harry Potter no longer attends Hogwarts. Where he has gone is a mystery.

Barty Crouch was treated and released by the DMLE. He left the Ministry building and has dropped out of sight.

Neville Longbottom placed the paper on the table and smiled slightly. The article was spot on and it didn't make anyone look good. The Ministry seemed to be scrambling to blame someone for what happened, while conditions here at the school were as tense as they were when students were being petrified by Slytherin's beast.

Dumbledore had invoked the code of conduct, which enabled the portraits to deduct points and inform staff of detention warranting behavior. Despite there being no house point competition this year, one fact was glaringly obvious. With the code active, the house point counters started working again and in less than two days, the snakes had lost over 1200 points, and that number was still climbing.

Professor Snape had a perpetual sour expression. He tried to compensate for the house counters by assigning points, but they were ignored by the counter.

Neville looked up from the table. Ron sat a few spots away, shoveling his food down as usual. Hermione sat at the far end of the table, her nose buried in a book. Both were refusing to speak to each other, which many in the house considered a blessing. The few conversations they'd had since Harry's departure quickly devolved into shouting matches where each hurled blame at the other across the Gryffindor common room.

"Not a happy time," murmured Parvati.

Neville glanced over at the dusky beauty. "No, it isn't and I don't think it's going to get any better for a while."

"What do you mean?" asked Lavender.

Neville sighed. "Harry has been put upon by the staff and students since first year. If that article is any example, I wouldn't be surprised to find other articles published, detailing what we've done. To my own personal shame, I didn't support my friend. I was certain he wouldn't put his name in the cup but because everyone else seemed to think so, I was afraid to support him."

Silence fell at Gryffindor table again as each revisited their own shameful participation in past events.

At the head table, Snape smacked the paper down on the table and turned to Dumbledore. "Headmaster, you can't allow this to continue!" he demanded.

Dumbledore's eyes narrowed as he looked at his potions master. "Oh? Allow what to continue?"

"The house counters! You need to shut them down!"

"Might I remind you, Professor, the house counters are tied to the code of conduct. They automatically reactivated when I invoked the code two days ago," Dumbledore countered frostily.

"But there's no house point competition this year!" protested Snape.

Dumbledore leaned back in his chair looking thoughtful. "You are right, Professor, but that is an oversight I can remedy." He stood and cast a sonorus on himself. "If I might have your attention please?" he called.

The hall fell silent and all eyes turned to him.

"No doubt you've all noted that the house point counters have been active for the past two days. This is because I have invoked the code of conduct, written by the founders of this school. It was pointed out to me that the house point competition is not running this year because of the tournament. This was a silly mistake on my part and since the counters are active you can safely assume that we will have the house point competition this year, including Quidditch."

A murmur ran through the hall and Dumbledore held up his hands to silence them. "Yes, yes, I know you're as pleased by this news as I am. Team captains are to see Madam Hooch as soon as possible so that we may schedule matches so they do not interfere with the tournament tasks."

Dumbledore turned to Slytherin house and his expression grew stern. "Slytherin students, you have a choice this year. Learn to respect your fellow students and treat them kindly, or learn that when you commit a crime, you earn a punishment. If you stop your

despicable behavior today, you have the remainder of the year to pull your house out of the hole it has dug."

He paused and looked around at the students before him. "A long time ago, our founders built this school at a time when people were fighting for the most trivial of reasons. The founders discovered that the students were, for the most part, prone to violence because they had been raised in a violent world. So they enacted the code, which enabled the staff to reward good behavior and punish bad behavior. They knew better than to expect everyone to get along, but they did insist that everyone be treated with respect. That is the core of our code of conduct. You will respect your fellow students, regardless of what house they may be in or who their parents are. If not, you will come to regret it."

He smiled benignly at the shocked students, then he nodded. "Classes are about to begin, so off you go."

The students filed from the hall in silence. For the second time, their kindly, if seemingly absent minded Headmaster had dressed down the student body. Though they didn't like it, they could not protest, as they knew it was well deserved.

Snape glared at the old man, then stormed from the hall. He was getting tired of Dumbledore trying to force his values on people.

Riddle Manor, November 17th...

The creature that was known as Lord Voldemort would have induce fits of laughter, rather than sheer terror, should a wizard stumble upon him. He was now in a small infant like body, covered with fine scales and small tufts of fur. He was very vulnerable and reliant upon others to do what was needed to keep him alive. Fortunately, he had managed to find one of his most loyal Death Eaters. A second had also been found, though he clung to the Dark Lord more for the protection he could provide.

His current plan revolved around constructing a new body for himself and dealing with the single greatest threat to his reputation - Harry Potter. He would use Potter to create a new body, then he would kill the boy, thus forever ending the myth of the Boy-Who-Lived.

"Wormtail, where is the paper?"

Peter Pettigrew winced visibly and shuffled forward. "Master, I have the paper, but I should warn you, something has gone terribly wrong with the plan."

"Oh?" asked Voldemort dangerously. He could threaten, he could command Nagini to attack, but even the slightest bit of magic exhausted him. The temptation to cast was so strong, he had commanded Wormtail to carry his wand until he was ready to use it.

"Master, the paper is reporting the tournament is in disarray. Barty Crouch has been arrested and Harry Potter has left Hogwarts after failing to complete the first task," Peter said with a bit of a whine, then he laid the paper in front of Voldemort.

The crude infant like Dark Lord leaned forward to read the paper, all the while cursing the poor eyesight of this constructed form.

"Left Hogwarts?" Voldemort muttered in amazement. "Left? He can't leave! I won't allow it! Send a message to Crouch. Tell him that either he finds Potter for my ritual or I will use him for the ritual instead!"

Peter bowed low. "Yes, Master," he droned.

"Out! Find Nagini! It's time for my feeding!"

Wormtail scurried from the room, grateful to be leaving his Master's presence.

"Left Hogwarts?" marveled the Dark Lord. "What are you up to, Potter? Did you detect my plan and flee like a coward?"

He leaned back on the chair and pondered the change to his plans. It bothered him that every time he had gotten himself involved with Potter, his plan never worked out the way he envisioned it.

Disko Island Weyr, November 20th...

Things had settled into a routine of sort at the Weyr. Harry spent some time with Sirius and Remus learning magic and time with Momnarth learning to care for Chekiath. Evenings were spent with

the two men and the three dragons, trying to determine what their next course of action should be.

The biggest surprise came on the evening of the second day that Remus and Sirius had been at the Weyr. Sirius had been telling Harry that they needed to leave the Weyr because, despite the stolen herds, food sources for the dragons on the island were rapidly diminishing. Spath interrupted the growing argument between Sirius and Harry with a simple comment of "We go when the Weyrleader commands it."

That announcement came as a shock to Sirius, but Remus had expected it. He even warned Sirius about it. The dragons were honoring Harry by appointing him Weyrleader.

For his part, Harry knew exactly what the food situation was and he was trying to come up with a solution for it. It was Dobby who had inadvertently given Harry an idea of how to approach the problem. Once he had his idea, he sent Dobby back to Gringotts, where he emptied his trust account, converting the entire amount into muggle money. The 20,000 or so galleons netted Harry nearly 100,000 pounds. With that, he'd buy the herds needed for his dragons.

For now, however, they had more pressing problems. Problems which they were currently meeting to discuss.

Harry sat on a stone facing the others. Spath, Momnarth and Chekiath were nearby. He had asked for Spath and Momnarth to join in the discussion and wherever Harry went, Chekiath was nearby. Remus, Sirius and Dobby were also sitting on the rocks, enjoying the sunshine and very thankful for the volcanic heat warming the rocks. Winter was in full force just over the lip of the crater, but here in the Weyr, it was almost comfortable, thanks to the warm steam rising from the pools.

Today's discussion had one new comer that hovered anxiously nearby, waiting and hoping to hear what was said.

"Well, Harry, you called this meeting, so it's your show," Sirius said.

Harry smiled fondly at Sirius. In some ways the man was still a child, joking and having fun. It was something that Harry envied greatly.

"I wanted to bring up a problem we have that I promised I would deal with," Harry said. "In my first year, Hagrid hatched a dragon egg in his hut. No one knew it at the time but a bond started to form. As far as Selanth is concerned, it did form, only not completely. She says the bond was muffled and she couldn't make out Hagrid at all.

"Despite the poorly formed bond, enough of it exists that when I impressed Cheki and the dragons got back their memories, Selanth recognized what had happened. She wants to be reunited to her rider."

"There are other potential riders where Hagrid lives," Spath added to the conversation.

Harry turned to stare at Spath in shock, then he shook his head. "More riders? Students?" He pressed a hand to his temple. "All right, that's another problem, but I think we need to deal with Hagrid and help Selanth before we deal with any more riders."

"That's probably a wise idea, Harry. If I understand Spath properly, we should offer all newly hatched dragons a chance to impress. Older dragons might impress on their own, but I believe that the ability to impress fades as they mature," Remus added.

Harry looked thoughtful. "Cheki won't be capable of long flights for couple of weeks. We won't even start his jumping between for another week or so. Figure it'll be nearly Christmas before we're really flying. Cheki, would it bother you if I asked another dragon to carry me until you're able?"

Cheki turned his head to eye his rider, his eyes twirled and flashed with a bright emerald green that Harry had begun to associate with amusement. "You are the Weyrleader, Harry, and you can talk to us all. Any dragon would be proud to carry you until I am able. Soon, we'll be flying and then we'll be a proper rider and dragon. For now, I won't mind if you ride another on Weyr business."

"Why do you need a ride, Harry?" asked Sirius.

"I was thinking that first we send Remus back to Hogwarts to talk to the old man and Hagrid. Then we can go get Hagrid and bring him here," Harry replied. "I'm not thinking about going there alone, if

that's what you're worried about. I just wanted to make sure that Cheki wouldn't be upset if another dragon gave me a ride."

"I would be honored to carry you until Chekiath can, Weyrleader," Momnarth said.

Harry turned and his smile broadened. He knew that the dragons didn't hold the same level of love and esteem for parents as humans did, but he couldn't help but feel a connection between himself and the mother of his dragon. "Thank you, Momnarth," he replied silently.

Chekiath rumbled his approval of Harry's feelings, which he felt across their bond.

"All right, then. Remus should get a note off to Dumbledore to arrange a meeting. What about the food issue, Harry? Ideally, this would be a great place to house a weyr but even I can see that we're going to need to find a place that can support food for the dragons. The only thing on this rock is snow, ice and more rocks," quipped Sirius.

"Smelly Dog is right. There are too many of us here now and the food herd has nothing to eat," Spath added.

Harry looked around the volcanic bowl and nodded unhappily. This place would be prime for the dragons, but there was no way to support a herd of food animals. "Perhaps we can change how we use this place," he mused aloud.

Spath turned to eye him curiously. "How so, Weyrleader?"

"Chekiath hatched after Momnarth accidentally hit his egg with dragon fire, so it seems to me that heat might be needed for proper egg hatching." Harry offered.

Spath's eyes glowed a soft blue in the deepening gloom and he rumbled while he thought. "Indeed. Heat has always helped mature eggs faster but we often go without heat because it isn't always available," he replied.

"That might be part of the problem, Spath," Remus said thoughtfully. "I have been considering the mystery of dragon kind for the past few

days and I've been trying to reconcile what I now know with what was normal."

The others looked at him and he shrugged. "It's not all that difficult. According to Spath, their world, Pern, had five types of dragons; gold, bronze, brown, blue and green. Only the golden queens laid eggs and all five types came from those eggs. Correct?"

Around him, several nodded in agreement and he could hear the others listening in and adding their own agreement.

"Now, today, we have ten known dragon breeds, each with their own fertile male and female versions. And we have to face one very important fact. Until Harry impressed Chekiath, no modern dragon talked to humans or even talked to other dragons. Something happened in the dim past that buried their abilities, something that forced them to forget where they came from and what they were. Whatever it was, caused a species with five distinct color types to evolve into ten unique breeds.

"I don't know what that something was. I'm still investigating with Spath's help. But the simple fact is it could have been a number of factors, including how eggs are incubated, that brought about these changes."

Harry looked thoughtful, but Sirius looked bored, which was never a good thing. He bounced to his feet.

"All right, here's a plan, Remus will study. Harry will lead and I'll take a few dragons and we'll go back to Britain and see if we can find a remote area where we can hold up for the winter."

"Smelly Dog," Spath said in warning.

Harry held up his hand. "No, Spath, Sirius is right, in his own way. We do need to find a place and we won't find one by wishing for it. Sirius could lead that effort to find a place we can live as a weyr while other issues are dealt with."

"Wait! Dragons can't just fly about the skies of Britain. The muggles will see them!" exclaimed Remus.

Spath rumbled in laughter and Remus turned to see Harry smirking at him. "What?" he demanded.

"Remus, dragons have been hiding from humans longer than wizards have been hiding dragons from muggles. Dragons might not be able to use wands, but they have a magic of their own that helps them. We've had two low level flyovers by muggle aircraft since we moved in here and they never saw a thing."

Harry turned to his godfather. "Siri, find yourself a dragon willing to carry you and a few others. Figure out how you want to search and let's see if we can find a place with some pasture lands that's reasonably remote."

Sirius grinned. "Are we going to buy the land or just move onto it?"

Harry shrugged. "I don't know yet."

Hogwarts, Defense Office, November 23rd...

The letter came with at the morning meal so he had to make a show of casting all sorts of spells to see if the letter was trapped in some way. One of the hardest aspects of pretending to be Alastor Moody was the man's paranoia. Moody had taken his paranoia to epic proportions and Barty had to at least pretend to be as paranoid.

Sitting at his desk, he quickly read the letter, which was in itself simple and dangerously to the point.

Barty,

The Master is displeased with what has happened to the tournament. He commands you to find Potter and bring the boy before him or be prepared to become part of the rite of resurrection yourself.

Pettigrew

A quick wave of his wand and the note burned to ashes, then he banished those ashes so no evidence remained of the note. That task done, he sat back on his chair and frowned. Potter was gone, the tournament was in shambles and his sole reason for staying here and pretending to be an old former auror was gone.

The one conversation he had with Dumbledore suggested that Potter could be anywhere in the world and he was surrounded by beasts that would protect him at all costs. Finding Potter was all but impossible and he didn't think he could achieve what the Master commanded.

And therein lay the problem. The Master had set an impossible goal for him and he knew the Master didn't suffer failure well. The more he thought about it, the less likely it seemed that the Master's plot would succeed.

Perhaps it's time I consider cutting my losses before they find my father and get him to confess about my escape, he mused. His father had run as soon as he had been released by the DMLE, probably thinking that the Death Eaters would be out to kill him. It had been a break for Barty Jr, but now it seemed like it was just a respite. Sooner or later, someone, the press probably, would catch up with his father and he'd talk. The Master's plan is doomed and I don't want to be put through his ritual. If there is one thing I've learned, it's that the Master cares only for himself.

He turned toward a bookshelf and levitated a book to him. "I wonder what south America is like this time of year?" he muttered.

While Voldemort continued to plot, his plans were about to go even more wrong.

Gringotts Executive, London...

Gapsit entered the room and knelt in a position of subservience on the floor in front of the council. He had failed and knew his life was now at risk.

Ragnok leaned forward on his chair. "Report."

"Lord, despite our best efforts, we were unable to restrain any dragon that enters the processing chamber. Our herd is now diminished by an additional 8 dragons, including four juveniles."

The council rumbled unhappily and Gapsit cowered in his place. He knew he was Ragnok's second and held mighty power within Gringotts, but these Goblins outranked even he, and could order his death if they wished.

"Has the human position changed in any way?" asked the head of the French Gringotts.

"The British Ministry has not altered its opinion in the least, but at least four other countries are considering the idea that the rumors out of Hogwarts about the dragons being intelligent are correct. Considering some of the changes in their behavior that we've seen, I have to admit there may be something to it."

Ragnok shook his head. "No, I refuse to accept that," he snapped, then he turned on Gapsit. "You say the Potter heir was involved in this somehow. Freeze his account and confiscate the Potter holdings, then send a message to Potter demanding he present himself before the council immediately. I will not allow us to lose so much revenue over some beasts. If Potter is at fault, he will pay for it!"

Gapsit nodded, relieved to be off the hook, for now, at least.

Disko Island Weyr, Greenland, November 24th...

The large owl landed in front of Harry and stuck out a leg. Shrugging, Harry removed the parchment and unrolled it.

Harry Potter,

You are hereby commanded to release whatever control you have over the dragons of Gringotts. You are further commanded to present yourself immediately for punishment or we will declare war on the Wizarding World.

Further, your vaults have been confiscated. We will make you bleed until your ancestors curse your name!

Ragnok, Gringotts Executive Council

Harry stood and scowled. He paced furiously for a moment, while Sirius and Remus watched him in shocked silence.

"If they want a war, I'll show them what it means to take on dragons!" Harry snarled. "Spath! Contact the senior dragon at

Gringotts. Tell him or her that I want to speak with them immediately."

"Harry, cub, what's going on?" asked Remus in alarm.

Harry picked up the letter and thrust it into Remus waiting hands. Sirius anxiously read the note over his friend's shoulder.

"Weyrleader, Polenth is here, but he cannot come into the sunlight. He jumped to one of our deeper caves. It is the same cavern that some of his clan have moved into recently."

Harry frowned and nodded to Spath. "Thank you."

"That makes sense, Harry. Those dragons were bred and have lived their entire lives underground. It's unlikely they could stand direct sunlight. I doubt they even retain the ability to fly," Remus offered.

"Harry," Sirius said nervously, "What are you planning?"

"They are killing my dragons, Sirius. I intend to put a stop to it, even if I have to kill every goblin in Gringotts."

Remus looked unhappy with that answer and even more unhappy because of the approving bellow from the dragons. Dragons had a genetic predisposition to not kill humans, but they held no such limitation in regard to the other sentient species. It was only Harry asking that they check with him first that made many dragons stop using the other species for food.

"Come on, you two. I need your help planning this," Harry said. "If we're lucky, we'll be able to bluff our way out of this mess."

Sirius and Remus exchanged a look, then fell into step behind Chekiath, who was following Harry towards the mouth of one of the deepest caves in the bowl.

Glen Catacol, Isle of Arran, off the coast of Britain, November 25th ...

The Isle of Arran in the firth of Clyde on the west coast of Scotland has a long and sometimes bloody history. For centuries man lived and worked on the island and in the surrounding waters, eking out marginal existence. Today, the mostly agrarian island survived on

tourism and a small island industry. Its a sleepy kind of place that attracts people looking for a simpler time and a simpler life.

Angus McNulty was an old man who had lived on the island for most of his life, except for two tours of duty as a member of the Royal Scots Dragoon Guards. After his time in Korea and elsewhere, he came home to raise a family and work, like his father and grandfather before him, for Lord Mills, who owned large tracts of land on the island.

For six generations his family had served the Lord's family and his own son would take over as game keeper soon. Mike was doing most of the work as it was, but he kept at it and tried to ignore the pain in his knees. Arthritis was the bane of all of his family and eventually led to the death of his father and grandfather, for once they stopped working, they seemed to give up on life. Angus swore to himself that he wouldn't let that happen to him.

Now he stopped the jeep and looked out at the empty field in bewilderment. There was supposed to be twenty eight sheep in this paddock! Stepping from the vehicle, he walked over to the gate where he spotted a small package swinging in the breeze. He untied the package from the gate and looked at it strangely.

The package turned out to be a small bundle of neatly stacked money, wrapped in a parchment, which contained a note. After reading the note, he hurried back to jeep. He needed to talk to Lord Mills!

Ten minutes later he pulled up at the manor house and spotted the current Lord Mills talking with one of the grounds keepers.

The current Lord was the seventh in his family line and he was a popular man, both on and off the island. A member of Parliament and a former naval officer, he was a personable fellow who generally always had a kind word for his people.

James Mills looked up and smiled at Angus. He had grown up with the man watching over him, and his own son was now following Angus' son around, learning the land and his future responsibilities like he and his father before him. The two families were tightly bound together and James often thought of Angus as more like a favorite uncle than a respected and trusted employee.

"Angus, how goes your inspection?" called James.

Angus walked over to the younger man. "My laird, we have a wee problem. I was up upon the winter pasture checking the flocks and one of 'em was missing! Gone! And I found this," he replied, handing over the bundle of money and the note.

James looked at him in confusion, then looked at the money in his hands. There had to be at least 10,000 pounds there! He glanced down at the note.

I didn't want to just take your sheep, but my friends really need them. I hope this covers the cost of the animals. Please don't think I'm a thief. If this isn't enough, I'll find out and get you more money.

Harry

James stared at the note, then at the neatly wrapped bundle of what looked like mint fresh money.

"Angus," he said, looking at the man, "gather up some of the boys and check all of our flocks. Make sure you get a count. Come see me when you're done. I'll call one of my friends at CID to look into this. If this money is real and not stolen from someone else, then they bought themselves some sheep and there's been no real crime, I think."

Angus nodded. He could easily understand his laird's confusion. He was feeling mighty confused himself!

"Aye, I'll do that now," he replied and moved off.

Lord Mills looked down at the money again, then he slipped it into his pocket and reached for his mobile phone.

Ragnok's Palace Chambers, The Goblin city of Gringault, November 26th...

He frowned. He had felt something and there, there it was again, a tremor under his feet and it was no normal Earth tremor. A banging at his door surprised him. Striding over to the door, he paused for a moment. He could hear what sounded like faint screaming.

Ragnok threw the door open. "What!" he exclaimed.

The guard at his door was missing his normal halberd. He clutched a small dagger in one hand and he was panting, obviously out of breath. "My lord," he gasped, "the dragons have attacked. We must flee the city!"

Ragnok's eyes bulged and he whirled towards one of the large open windows facing his city. Gringault was built in an enormous cavern and the ceiling was nearly a thousand feet above their heads. In the space between the ceiling and the city below, hundreds of dragons wheeled and dived on his city!

"NO!" he gasped. He could see dragons swooping down and plucking goblins right off the streets. Goblin magic was about as effective on dragons as wizard magic and the guards, who were trained to fight wizards, were helpless in the face of so many dragons.

Other dragons were flaming the streets and building tops, driving his people from their homes and out into the open where they were plucked from the streets. Once a dragon had a goblin firmly in its grasp, it rose above the building tops and vanished from sight.

The guard stepped into the room and tugged on Ragnok. "My lord, we must flee!" he urged.

Numb, Ragnok let the guard pull him from the room. The idea of having to flee their ancient home chilled him to the bone.

The pair of goblins ran to the front exit of the building and, once they entered the broad golden steps that led down to the street level, they skidded to a halt. In front of them on the street were two rows of dragons in precise order. Overhead, a flight of dragons wheeled and flamed the entrance to the Palace, blocking off their only source of retreat.

A lone Hungarian Horntail broke from the formation overhead and landed neatly at the bottom of the steps. Ragnok was shocked to see the dragon carried a human rider. He recognized the rider, the Potter hair was unmistakable.

Harry slid down from Momnarth's shoulders and patted her flank affectionately. Momnarth eyed the young human with amusement. His respect and feeling for her were unusual and not something normal for dragons. There was no real parental bond among dragons, but Harry thought there should be and insisted on respecting her for being his dragon's mother.

Ragnok took one cautious step forward and a dragon dove. Before he could react, the guard that had been with him was plucked from his side. The guard screamed in terror and there was a chilling blast of cold air. Then the dragon and the guard were gone.

"What are you doing?" he screamed at the human.

"You are food, we are collecting food for a feast," answered Momnarth, who Harry and the Marauders had carefully coached.

Ragnok's eyes grew wide and he stared at the dragons in horror.

Harry nodded. "That's right. We've decided that you're mindless beasts, suitable to feed my friends. Every time you see a dragon wink out, another one of your people is being sent to the herd pens. There are a lot of you beasts in Britain. You will feed my friends for a long time."

"He looks tasty. May I eat him, Weyrleader?" Polenth rumbled. The dragons were deliberately letting Ragnok hear him. In fact, they were greatly enjoying themselves.

Harry took another step forward and Ragnok growled. A dozen dragons bellowed in reply and shot fire all around him.

"A warning, Goblin," Harry said with a sneer copied from Snape. "Threaten me or my friends at your peril. Right now, your entire race stands on the brink of a war of extinction."

"But we're not beasts!" protested a cowering Ragnok. He was unarmed and dressed in his nightclothes. Never before had he felt so powerless.

"And we are?" demanded Polenth angrily. The large dragon stepped forward, his eyes spinning wildly and glowing bright red. "We tried to

Speak to your dragon handlers but you ignored us! We are not beasts!"

"You always have been!" Ragnok shot back angrily, then cringed and fell to his knees. The dragon fire was coming perilously close. He knew his handlers had been ordered to ignore any signs of intelligence from the dragons.

"You have a choice, Ragnok," Harry said mildly. "Dragons can be used for profit without killing them, and they are willing to work with you, but only if you change your ways. If you don't, by tonight your beautiful city will be a ghost town and goblins will become a rarity in the magical world as we hunt you down for food. There is no place on this planet where you can hide from dragons."

"You can't do this! You'll ruin the wizarding economy!" shouted Ragnok. Potter was scaring him senseless.

Harry stood to his full height, which might not have been very impressive, but it was still much taller than Ragnok. "I am Weyrleader. I care not for the wizarding economy and I intend to force them to change, as well. I would have ignored you, but you stole my money and continue to try to kill my friends. I will not allow that to stand."

Dozens of dragons around him thrummed in approval and Ragnok cowered back in fear. The rapidly twirling red eyes of the dragons unnerved him, and Harry stood before him radiating a high degree of magic, adding to his uneasiness.

"Decide!" snapped Harry. "Will you work with us or will you be food?"

Ragnok slumped to the ground and looked around piteously. There wasn't a single goblin in sight and he could see the dragons overhead still wheeling and diving, plucking his citizens from their homes. He could hear the children screaming in fear as their parents were plucked skyward to vanish in that terrifyingly frigid blast of air.

It never occurred to the Goblins to build roofs on their houses, since it never rained in Gringault. That left them wide open to an airborne assault.

"I yield," Ragnok whispered. "You win."

Harry smiled. "Excellent. I think you will find that dragons are more profitable for Gringotts when they are treated as they are meant to be treated - as intelligent, thinking creatures. Polenth, the leader of the Dragon clan of Gringotts, will show you how they can help you make a profit.

"Oh, and one last thing. You will return my vaults to me."

Ragnok eyed the large dragon warily and nodded unhappily.

"Do not think of betraying us, Goblin," Harry said. "The dragons will be patrolling your vaults and will deny access to them if you attempt to betray us. And I can have ten thousand dragons here in an instant. Then nothing will stop us from feasting upon your race."

Harry turned to Polenth. "Call if you need our assistance again, Polenth."

The coal black dragon turned and bobbed his head at Harry. "Thank you, Weyrleader. We may never have riders like the above ground dragons, but you are our Weyrleader."

Harry smiled and returned to Momnarth. "I'm glad that went so well," he said silently.

"As am I, Weyrleader," replied Momnarth. "It is good to know our below ground kin will be safe now."

An hour later, Harry was back at Disko, curled up with his own dragon and trembling as the tension of the past few days slowly ebbed from him. Chekiath rumbled softly and Dobby watched from his spot nearby. Harry had gambled and won this time. The Goblins of Gringotts would leave them alone or they would bring down the wrath of the dragons upon themselves.

Sirius and Remus had helped as much as they could, but the dragons would only listen to Harry. It had been up to him to put the fear of dragons into the Goblins. As far as the dragons were concerned, he had performed magnificently. If he needed this time alone to come down from the stress, they wouldn't complain.

The Three Broomsticks, Room #3, Hogsmeade, November 28th...

Albus Dumbledore opened the door and entered, followed by a rather confused Hagrid. The Headmaster had been trying to arrange this meeting for several days, but between problems at the school and problems at the Ministry, his time had been exceedingly limited.

Hagrid took a seat that Rosemerta kept around especially for the large man. A moment later, Rosemerta bustled in, followed by two serving girls who placed out a tea service and some large bottles of ale for Hagrid.

Albus smiled at the buxom bar owner. "Thank you, my dear. I'm sure this will suit us just fine."

"Begging yer pardon, Professor, but are yer shure you need me here?" asked Hagrid nervously.

"Oh, yes, my boy. The person we came to see asked for you specifically," Albus replied, as he poured himself a cup of tea.

The door opened and a man slipped into the room.

"Remus Lupin!" exclaimed Hagrid, "Yer a sight fer sore eyes! Come in. Have a drink and relax a spell!"

Remus smiled at his friend, then he nodded cordially to Albus. "Good evening, Headmaster, Hagrid."

Albus smiled at the man who seemed to be fairly chipper considering two nights ago he had undergone his transformation.

He didn't know that Remus had been carefully watched over by dragons during his transformation. The constant presence of dragons in his mind was almost as good as the wolfsbane potion. The dragons talked to him the entire time, forcing him to stay connected to his human mind. It certainly wasn't a cure, but it was one of the least stressful transformations he had ever experienced.

Remus walked over to the tea service and poured a cup before taking a seat across from the two men. "First off, Albus, Harry sends his thanks for letting Dobby take some food and basic supplies. He gave me some money to give to you."

Dumbledore waved Remus to silence. "Nonsense. What was taken was minor and Harry should keep his money for more important matters. As you are here, I am assuming you've left Harry?"

Remus chuckled and shook his head. "No, I've not left Harry. I merely came here because I have two friends who are hurting and I wanted to help them. Harry asked me to come, since his Godfather is still a wanted man and Harry is too much of a celebrity to walk around unmolested. I was the logical choice."

Albus nodded and Hagrid looked on in confusion.

Remus turned to the large man. "Hagrid, I'm going to tell you a story, so please, just relax. You're not in any trouble, and if Harry is any example, your life could drastically change tonight."

When both men blinked and looked at him in surprise, Remus smiled. "I assure you, I'm not crazy, but this story may sound insane."

Albus leaned forward in his chair and motioned for Remus to begin.

"Dragons, as we know them, are not from this world at all. They were created, yes created, by men far smarter than we are. What I know for a fact is that sometime in our future, the muggles will go to the stars and start colonies on distant worlds. On one such world, a hidden menace struck the colony, and in desperation, they created dragons as a means to fight the enemy.

"The dragons they created were intelligent and were supposed to pair up with a human, a rider, who would care for the dragon and direct it in defending the colony. The pair, dragon and rider, could communicate telepathically. Rider and dragon were bonded for life, and if one part of the pair died, the other would usually commit suicide.

"Among the abilities that these men gave their dragons, was the ability to teleport themselves, much like apparation. But it's an entirely different mechanic from apparating that the dragons call 'going Between'. The dragon blinks out, and for a few seconds you are exposed to the most intense cold you have ever experienced,

then you have arrived at your destination. That destination could be down the block, across the globe or even across space and time."

Remus paused and watched Albus closely. He knew most of this story would be beyond Hagrid, but he also knew Hagrid would be patient. No, Albus was the one who concerned him right now.

Dumbledore sat stunned and started putting two and two together. "You mean the dragons of today came from our future?"

Remus nodded somberly. "Once, a great queen dragon, heavy with eggs waiting to be laid, lost her rider to a tragic accident and she went Between. Understand that, when a dragon's rider is lost, he or she jumps Between, but never reemerges. They suicide. That is what this queen did, but something went wrong. I don't know if it was because she was still young or because she was pregnant, but instead of committing suicide, she came here, to the home world of the people who had created her kind. And she arrived long before her creators even learned how to read or write. She arrived before mankind as we know it even existed.

"The dragons speak of Sidraneth with awe and reverence and call her the mother of dragons. Having experienced the memory of her jump, I can't help but be moved by it. Harry tells me that the time of the queen's arrival was anywhere from 11,000 to 125,000 years ago."

Remus took a sip of his tea then he leaned forward in his seat. "Albus, you need to understand, dragons from this other world revered humans and were as intelligent as you and I. But having survived for so long without humans, they changed. I believe that, over time, they lost the ability to speak to humans and each other. Perhaps lost is the wrong word. Forgot would be better. Then Harry impressed Chekiath a Hungarian Horntail.

"He can speak to any dragon, but he bonded to Chekiath as his rider. The very process of bonding awoke the memories stored in every dragon on the planet. They remember who they once were and realized that Harry represents what they desperately want. They want the rider/dragon bond again. In a way, the bonding to a human gave them back their intelligence and their ability to speak with each other and with humans.

"In the instant of their bonding, dragons around the world awoke to what they had forgotten they once were. They will no longer eat a human, though they will protect themselves and will kill if necessary. They remember how to go between and they understand the bond.

"Only hatchlings can bond, but all of the dragons on earth want that to begin again. And that brings me to another reason for this meeting and why I asked Hagrid to be here."

Hagrid looked shocked and Remus smiled gently at his friend. "Hagrid, several years ago, you nurtured an egg and it hatched a baby Norwegian Ridgeback. I believe you even named 'him' Norbert."

Hagrid broke into a huge smile. "Aye, is he well? Have you seen him?"

Remus' smile broadened. "Hagrid, she is very well and she is asking for you. You see, you started to bond with her, but your non-human heritage slowed the bonding process. Selanth, that's her real name, believes that the bond will mature if you would just be with her. She feels the bond on her side and feels like a part of her is missing."

Hagrid looked at Remus blankly for a moment. "Norbert's a girl? Selanth? It's a pretty name. Wait, I'll be able to talk to her? She wants me? Truly?"

When Remus nodded, the large man's eyes filled with tears. Albus smiled, then patted him on his arm and conjured a tablecloth for him to use to blow his nose.

"It looks like Hagrid will be going to join young Harry," Albus said with a bit of a wistful sigh.

Hagrid looked up at Albus, his expression torn. "But Hogwarts," he protested.

Albus patted him on the arm again. "Hagrid, my old friend, I know you'd be happier surrounded by dragons. We'll manage. In a way, I envy you. Think about it, Hagrid! The dragons can talk and you'll have one who can talk to you. What tales might you hear? It's a

marvel," Dumbledore said, then he trailed off, still considering the idea.

"Hagrid," Remus said slowly. "I want you to consider this carefully. Right now we're living very rough. There's no local pub you can run down to. It's just us and the dragons. But we could use your help. The Weyr needs someone to be our Weyrhealer. You know magical animals better than anyone I know. We could use your help to keep the dragons healthy."

Hagrid smiled at Remus, his eyes sparkling. Here was a form of recognition that he had been denied by the wizards. And he had a dragon asking for him! Him!

After Remus made arrangements to meet with Hagrid the next night to bring him to the Weyr, he then spent several hours with Dumbledore, explaining the situation in the Weyr and learning

about the trouble brewing in Britain.

Dumbledore had been initially shocked by Harry's action at Gringotts, but he felt better when Remus explained that it was mostly a bluff. The dragons could kill goblins, but they really weren't interested in starting a war with them. To Harry, it was an action designed to protect the dragons that Gringotts had - dragons that were unable to return to the surface after so many generations underground.

According to Albus, there was a strong sentiment growing in the Wizengamot to try Harry for treason and attempting to destroy the British wizarding economy. That effort was being led by Fudge, who blamed Potter for the current dragon crisis.

At the school, Slytherin had finally gotten their act together and stopped losing points. That was the good news. The bad news was that a number of the members of that house had taken to ambushing students that dared to venture outside the view of the portraits, which generally meant on the routes taken to and from the greenhouses or Care of Magical Creatures classes. Albus was still struggling to fix that particular problem.

Disko Island Weyr, November 30th...

Harry twirled his wand and a bucket of warmed oil appeared. Dobby popped in with a large, stiff bristle brush, which he handed to Harry. Dobby spent most of his days popping to various places, stealing various things, like bales of hay, which he brought for the livestock. The hay solved the immediate problem of keeping the herds fed, but it still wasn't a solution they could use for long.

Nodding his thanks, Harry dipped the brush into the oil, then turned to apply the mixture to Chekiath's wing sail. The little dragon snuffled loudly and his neck stretched out as he crooned with pleasure.

Not far from where Harry stood, Hagrid copied his movements, using a much larger brush on Selanth. Reuniting Hagrid and Selanth was a memory that Harry would always treasure. Remus returned with Hagrid to the Weyr and Selanth came charging up to the large man who barely had the time to dismount from Momnarth.

The pair stopped and stared at each other for a long moment, then Selanth stretched out her neck and nudged his shoulder gently. With tears in his eyes the half giant caressed her eye ridges and she crooned in pleasure. Suddenly the pair stopped all motion and both stared at each other. If they were touching, Selanth could hear him and he could hear her. It wasn't a perfect bond, but it was far better than Selanth hoped would happen.

"Remember to really rub the oil in," Momnarth said, bringing Harry back out of his memories. "Dry scales will crack and create painful sores. A dragon dare not go Between with a cracked scale."

"How did you do this without help?" asked Harry.

Momnarth's eyes twirled and slowly changed to yellow, the color Harry now equated with stress and unhappiness. "We didn't have any help. Growing up like we did, we suffered through cracks and painful sores. Some... some of us got sick and didn't live long. The rest got better when they became adults and the scales stopped shedding. It was a good thing we forgot about Between, otherwise many would have made the long jump just to escape the pain."

"My front shoulder itches, Harry," Chekiath said. Harry immediately turned and worked at the spot with the stiff brush. He couldn't believe how quickly Chekiath was growing. Momnarth, at fifty two

feet from snout to tail, was almost big enough to be classed as an Imperial Horntail. If she was any example, Chekiath was going to be huge! Already the little dragon was nearly sixteen feet long and that was just a few weeks of growth.

Harry glanced over at Selanth and Hagrid and smiled. She was fully grown, and at twenty eight feet long, a fine example of the Norwegian Ridgeback. She really didn't need the oiling at her age, but she was enjoying the attention from her rider. Hagrid, of course, was in seventh heaven.

The pair didn't have the ability to communicate as well as Harry and Chekiath, but they could talk to each other as long as they were in physical contact. And despite Hagrid's size, Selanth could easily carry him. It looked weird and Harry couldn't believe it at first, but they were a true bonded pair.

Spath had told Harry that a dragon could always carry their rider. Remus speculated that it was part of the dragon's inherent belief in themselves. They believed they could do something, so they did it. Remus also thought the dragons had some magical abilities that weren't part of their original design. He suggested that their abilities to resist many spells and to hide from the muggles might be part of some inherent magical ability.

Hagrid finished up with Selanth, then he picked up a large harpoon and a coil of rope. He lifted one leg and straddled Selanth. Harry didn't want to say that the pair looked utterly ridiculous, though they did, because the look of absolute devotion that passed between them was something he could well understand. With a mighty leap, Selanth was airborne with the large man on her back and they vanished from sight.

Harry sighed. Hagrid had taken his new duties to care for the dragons very seriously. As part of what he saw as his duty, he supplemented the Weyr's food supply by bringing back some seals and even once a small Minke whale.

Harry turned back to Chekiath and dipped his brush again, before scrubbing vigorously at the base of his neck. "Soon we'll be flying like Selanth and Hagrid," he muttered. "Soon."

"Very soon, Harry," Chekiath agreed. "Momnarth says that I am to start new wing exercises in a few days. It will be soon."

Harry smiled broadly and leaned up against his dragon, resting his head on his side. Chekiath turned and eyed his rider fondly, thrumming against him. Soon they'd be flying the skies like they were born to do.

Later that evening, a very serious discussion was started around the communal fire that Dobby maintained. Dobby often went far afield to obtain enough wood for the nightly bonfire. It wasn't really necessary for the dragons, but the humans appreciated the heat and light in the winter chill.

"Harry," Sirius began. "We were overflying a town today looking for a place to Weyr and something came up."

"Oh?"

"Momnarth, would you show Harry the memory of his impression? Especially the part with the shade?" Sirius asked.

Like so many of the dragons, she was sitting nearby, watching and listening. She lifted her head and turned her gaze to Harry.

He watched the memory in his mind for a moment. It shocked and scared him to think that he had something of the Dark Lord in him.

He shook in revulsion and Chekiath crooned soothingly to him, then butted him with his head. He absently reached for his dragon, caressing just behind the eye ridges. "That was in me?"

"We think so," Remus said. "We think it was something left over from when he tried to kill you. It's gone now, so you don't have to worry about. On the other hand, the wing of dragons that have been searching with Sirius have been keeping an eye out for anything like that. Until today, they never sensed anything like it."

Sirius nodded. "Right. We were flying over a town called Little Hangleton when all of the dragons became agitated. Norendrath explained to me about the evil spirit that came out of you and he told me to speak to Spath about it. Spath explained what happened to you."

Harry leaned against Chekiath and absently rubbed his fading scar. "So you flew over Voldemort?"

Sirius frowned. "We don't honestly know, Harry. What we do know is that we flew over something that felt like what came from your head. The dragons wanted to flame the house right then and there, but I convinced Norendrath that you needed to be told about it."

Harry looked over to Norendrath in the gloom beyond the firelight and the big Romanian Longhorn watched him with softly twirling green eyes. "It doesn't happen too often, Norendrath, but occasionally Sirius is right. This is one of those times."

"Hey!" Sirius exclaimed in protest.

Around the fire the dragons rumbled with laughter. They had a surprising sense of humor and even occasionally indulged in practical jokes. The day Sirius stepped from his tent into a steaming pile of dragon dung had Harry rolling on the floor howling with laughter.

Harry chuckled at his godfather's antics, then he turned serious again. "So what do we do?"

Sirius turned back from glaring at Norendrath. He was convinced the large Longhorn had deposited the dung in front of his tent in retaliation for his turning the dragon pink one day. "I think we need to watch the place first, Harry. Let's see who goes in and who goes out. If we don't spot any movement after a few days, Remus and I can take a closer look."

"It's possible that Voldemort left more cursed objects like that diary you told us about, Harry," added Remus.

Harry nodded thoughtfully, then he looked over to Spath. "Spath? What do you think?"

Although Harry was considered the Weyrleader, he made it a point to get an opinion from the ancient dragon. He respected the elder dragon and wanted to make a point that dragons were not subservient to their riders.

"Weyrleader, this is an evil that must be cleansed. Our way would be to burn the ground upon which it stands, but if we must be cautious, then this is the way to do it."

Harry nodded. "All right. Sirius, use the flight you've been working with to set a watch on this house. Let's keep an eye on it for a week and see what's going on. The dragons should be able to tell if the evil moves."

Sirius nodded and looked over to Norendrath, who led the group of dragons that Sirius had been working with. The pair had not bonded, but there was enough mutual respect between the two that they worked well together. In a way, it was a major shift in what Remus was calling 'Pern Standard'. Sirius was showing that a bond of close friendship could form that was very effective.

"Anything else? Dobby? How are we doing on the herds?"

"We have enoughs hay for now, but sheepies is getting low again," Dobby replied.

Harry nodded. He and Momnarth would have to go 'buy' more sheep soon.

"I have summat too, 'arry," offered Hagrid.

Harry turned to his large friend. "What's that, Hagrid?"

The half giant held up a small scale that looked torn nearly in half. "Perath is not quite a year old and he came to me because of some cracked scales and an infection. I had to cut this scale away to treat him. Look at what I found."

Hagrid pointed the scale straight out and muttered, "Lumos"

The scale started to glow nearly as brightly as a wand tip casting the spell.

Remus sat up suddenly and stared at the glowing scale. "Incredible! But why not? The wizards use heartstrings, don't they? They don't know the naturally shed scales could also act as a focus! Harry, this means they don't have to kill dragons for heartstrings!" he exclaimed.

"No, just for the leather, meat and potion ingredients," Harry replied dryly. "I realize what you're talking about here, Remus. We can offer an alternative to heartstrings, but it won't solve the problem. I do think we need to start stockpiling the scales that are shed naturally during a dragon's first year."

"I'll handle that, Harry, at least until we have riders to care for their own dragons," offered Hagrid.

"Thank you, Hagrid," Harry replied with a smile. He'd make sure the dragons were well taken care of.

Wizengamot Chambers, December 1st...

Albus looked down sourly at Cornelius Fudge. The Minister had called this special session of the Wizengamot and he was uncomfortable not knowing what the Minister had planned.

"Minister Fudge, you asked for this session. The Wizengamot is assembled, except for four members who are ill. We wait to hear what you have to say," Dumbledore intoned according to the ritual formula.

Fudge walked to the center of the chamber and looked around for a moment. Most of the faces reflected curiosity, or in the case of a few, anticipation.

"Lords and Ladies of the Wizengamot, our country faces a crisis. In the past few weeks we have been inundated by complaints from across the country. These all have one common element. They are all complaining about loss of business due to a distinct shortage of dragon products.

"Only this morning, St. Mungo's reported major shortages of potions and an inability to replace those potions because they do not have the necessary ingredients. Again, dragon based ingredients. Gringotts has failed to deliver on their contractual obligations for potion ingredients. As much as I distrust and dislike the goblins, they are not the only people who maintain herds of the beasts.

"Around the world, every country is reporting a similar crisis and the world wide wizarding economy is teetering on the brink of a global collapse!"

Fudge paused as a murmur swept through the chamber. When it settled down, he began again. "This morning I have authorized a battalion of Aurors to the Shetland Island reserve. Their orders are simple. Put down as many dragons as they can, using the killing curse. I have a score of brewers and other harvesters waiting to follow them so we can restart delivery of these necessary items for our economy."

Another murmur ran through the chamber, only this time it was laced heavily with approval. Few knew that the Ministry's idea of a battalion was pitifully tiny, and comprised of most of the employed aurors. "My Lords, my Ladies, it is the opinion of your Ministry that this problem was brought about by the events that occurred during the Triwizard Tournament and the actions of the Headmaster of Hogwarts, who even now, presides over this body and is glaring at me, disapproving of my actions."

Many eyes turned to Dumbledore and they all noted his unhappy frown.

"Your Ministry is obligated to work with the Wizengamot when it comes to major issues like this, but we find it difficult at best when the Chief Warlock is openly hostile to our actions. Therefore, as Minister, I call for a vote of no confidence against the Chief Warlock."

Cries of protest and joy rang through the hall and Dumbledore slowly stood. He was hated by many who thought he was too forgiving and too obstructionist against pure blood policies. But despite that, he was also feared. He was Dumbledore, a wizard far stronger than any of them.

"My friends, I can see the way things are going here and I will save you the trouble of a formal vote by resigning. I will, however, tell you one thing. This action is a mistake and when you finally realize the magnitude of it, do not come to me for help. For years I have tried to teach tolerance to this body and I can see I have failed miserably at it.

"Now you will get to sleep in the bed you have made for yourselves and I can only hope, for your sake, that you wake up in time to save yourselves."

Dumbledore turned and walked from the room, ignoring the openly gleeful face of Fudge and many others. But here and there in the chamber, people looked unhappy at the loss of what they felt was a great man.

Like any other social change, the establishment of the first true Weyrs of Earth resulted in a struggle between Muggle and Wizard society. It would be the first major conflict between the two since the collapse of the Spanish Inquisition in 1834. The conflict began with the great dragon economic boycott, brought about by the impression of Harry James Potter and his dragon, Chekiath.

Excerpted from *The Weyrs of Earth* by Remus John Lupin, published 2040.

Author's Note:

A couple of comments in relation to some reviews and other stuff.

Yes Dragonriders of Pern fan fiction is allowed. To the individual that was convinced it isn't and has turned off the abilities to receive messages I publicly mock you. Your wrong and nana nana boo boo! I would have sent you a nice reply explaining whats allowed but your turning off messages tells me you don't care to hear from anyone else and now millions of people are laughing at you and eating your donuts. Do you honestly think the folks on this fan fiction site would have offered up a Dragonriders of Pern category if it wasn't allowed?

No we don't use a brit picker. The Harry Potter books we read were Americanized for us colonials so I'm afraid you Brits will have put up with it. You get what you pay for.

Please remember that in the Potter Verse there are 10 breeds of dragons. That means that the original queen came to Earth so long ago that different breeds could develop. Because of that there will be no true queen. There can't be. Each Breed had fertile male and female pairs.

We will see some very Pernish characteristics filtering back into the dragon breeds, but the age of one queen to breed them all is gone.

For those that haven't read the Pern series by Anne McCaffrey I strongly recommend you do. There will be some references that might not make sense, but on the whole we are trying to explain their abilities and origins so that you, the reader will be able to follow along. Remember all of the people in our story are unfamiliar with Pern as well.

Useful Information:

Dragon Eye Colors

Green – Amusement

Yellow – Stress

Blue – Happiness

Red – Anger

Black – Fear

Standard Disclaimer:

"Bob have you seen my llamas? I went out to feed them and they aren't there!" exclaimed Alyx.

Bob hastily pulled the blinds on the group of dragons feeding on Alyx's herd of Llamas. "Ummm no I've not seen them. Perhaps they moved away? I know they were unhappy when you brought that industrial lumber saw."

Alyx glared at him and stomped her foot. Bob howled in agony, Alyx was wearing her ice cleats again and she used his foot to stomp on!

"I know you had something to do with this!" she snarled. "Now where are my Llamas?"

Hopping around on one foot while trying to bandage the other, Bob grimaced. "Tell the nice people the disclaimer and I'll tell you where they are."

Alyx perked up. "Its chapter time again?"

Bob nodded, then put on his heavy duty leather boots with built in impervious charm. "Yes, it is, stand on the shiny plate there and give the nice people the disclaimer."

She looked at him with distrust, but she also moved to stand on the plate. Bob nodded in satisfaction, "Let me just put the lights on you."

He flipped several switches and a spotlight shone down on her. Nervously she looked at the audience over her shoulder. Confused, she tried to move, but the electro-magnet at her feet locked the metal cleats in place. "BOB!"

"Tell them the words!" Bob repeated menacingly.

"We don't own Harry Potter or the Dragon Riders. Now let me go or so help me I'll..."

"Nah, you did that last week and I enjoyed it. Remember?" countered Bob.

She glared at him and he opened the blinds. She took one look out the window and spotted the dragons eating her llamas. "Nooooo!"

Bob smiled smugly and dusted off his pants. "Enjoy the chapter folks. But next week might be delayed if Alyx manages to catch me."

"I'm going to so kill him," she muttered.

Dragons are highly magical. As such, they pose a bit of a puzzle. In almost every case of a class 5 magical creature, there is an intelligence behind them. Even the dreaded Nundu can be said to have a limited intelligence. Legilimency attempts on Nundus revealed they have a social hierarchy and are self aware. Dragons are the exception to this rule. They are true beasts, as all attempts to use Legilimency on them has failed entirely. Why this is, no one knows. It is, however, safe to assume that they have no more intelligence than the common wolf or lion.

Excerpt from *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find them* by Newt Scamander, published 1927.

Ministry of Magic, Office of the Minister, December 2nd...

Cornelius stared at the parchment in his hand in dismay. This can't be happening, he thought. The Wizengamot is going to boil me in oil over this!

The door opened and Lucius Malfoy strutted in. He was just about the only person in Britain that could waltz into his office unannounced.

"Good morning, Cornelius," said the blond. "Have you heard from our people at Shetland? When can we expect shipments to start again?"

"Never," whispered a terrified Fudge.

"I'm sorry, I don't believe I heard you correctly," Malfoy said, his eyes narrowing. He was unused to one of his plans going awry.

When Fudge mutely passed a note across the desk, he took it and read quickly.

Minister,

We arrived as scheduled and immediately went to the area where most of the dragons were clustered. There were no dragon handlers here to assist us as promised. As soon as we approached the beasts, the entire complement of dragons vanished.

There are no dragons here now. Please send instructions. The reporters you sent with us have already left. Should we stay in case they come back?

John Dawlish,

Senior Auror.

Malfoy read and reread the note several times trying to understand what it said. The dragons were gone?

The dragons of the Shetland Island reserve had jumped ahead exactly one week, to a time when the British thought the reserve was empty and no one was watching it.

"No dragons," whispered Malfoy.

"No dragons," repeated Fudge angrily. "And the press was there to record that fact! I can't even blame Dumbledore because you had me kick him out of his position!"

Malfoy winced. This situation was quickly going from bad to worse and all of his plotting didn't seem to be helping matters.

Riddle Manor House, Little Hangleton, December 4th...

Norendrath nudged Sirius awake. He had been dozing against the flank of the dragon. Watching the house was downright boring! So far, no one had come or gone from the residence, but there was a daily post owl delivery so he knew someone was home.

"There is movement inside the house."

Shaking himself awake, he stared at the house, noticing movement. He nodded to the big dragon. "Thanks, mate," he said softly.

The big longhorn rumbled with a draconic laugh. "You still snore, Smelly Dog."

Sirius winced. Oh, how he hated that name! Scowling and pushing the thought aside, he pulled out his wand and waited.

Hidden around the house nine other dragons, all part of his original search group. As far as the dragons were concerned, something in that house was a danger to the Weyrleader and to themselves, so they gladly sat watching for now. If given a choice, they would have simply flamed the building, burning it to the ground.

The front door opened and Sirius tightened his grip on his wand.

Wormtail stepped outside and held the door open as the longest snake Sirius had ever seen slithered out of the house.

"The snake also tastes of evil, Smelly Dog. I will ask Corath to take care of it," Norendrath said.

"Thanks, big guy. Wormtail is mine," Sirius muttered.

Wormtail watched the large snake with revulsion in his gaze for a moment, then he let the door close behind him. He stepped further out onto the porch and breathed deeply, as if needing the fresh air. Sirius could well imagine how the old house must have smelled.

Once Wormtail stepped on the stairs to the front porch, Sirius whipped up his wand and cast a silent stunner. Wormtail had enough time to blink in shock at the incoming spell, then he collapsed to the ground.

At the same moment, a large Norwegian Ridgeback swooped down from the skies and plucked Nagini from the winter grass. The large snake tried to bite the dragon, but even with her magically enhanced size, she couldn't break the skin of the dragon. Mid-flight, Corath curled his head down, and with a single bite, relieved Nagini of her head.

"Norendrath, this is bigger than we thought," Sirius said. "I need you to bespeak Spath and have Remus brought here."

The longhorn looked at Sirius for a moment, then he nodded and looked away.

Sirius walked over to the stunned Wormtail and bound him tightly in ropes.

He shivered in the backwash from a dragon appearing and turned to watch Spath land with Remus on his back.

Remus slid down from the large dragon and hurried over to Sirius. Seeing Wormtail, he pulled his wand.

"The snake tastes of the evil, Smelly Dog, but the taste is still strong. There is something else here," Spath said.

Sirius turned to look at Remus. "You don't think?"

Remus nodded grimly. "It could be. We know he didn't die that night."

Sirius turned to Spath. "Remus and I are going to check out the house. If someone comes, please warn us."

Corath dropped the head of Nagini and the rest of the body in front of the house. Spath eyed the pile for a moment before looking at Norendrath.

"I will take care of it, Elder," replied the young Longhorn. The dragon turned to the remains and breathed fire for a second. That was all it took for the snake to be reduced to ashes.

"Thank you, Norendrath. My flame grows weaker with every passing turn."

The other dragons looked at Spath and crooned softly. He was the oldest living dragon and was highly respected. He would be greatly missed when he passed on.

Sirius and Remus shared a brief look between them. Something had passed between the dragons that they weren't privy to. Sirius shrugged and flowed into his animagus form. He sniffed the air and his hackles rose. For the first time he could sense the evil the dragons had been talking about.

"Let's go, Padfoot," Remus said softly.

Spath watched the pair approach the house and then he turned back to Norendrath. "I know it is too late for you to impress, young one, but you have chosen well in befriending Smelly Dog. The Weyrleader is lucky to have such men as family."

Norendrath gave the dragon version of a shrug. "Smelly Dog is funny and his devotion to the Weyrleader is complete. For a human, he isn't too bad. And his other form is delicious."

Several of the dragons around the building chuckled. Norendrath had made a big deal about how tasty dog could be. As a result, Sirius absolutely refused to change unless Harry or Remus was nearby.

Up on the second floor of the run down old house Remus and Sirius stumbled upon the darkest wizard to ever terrify the wizarding world. They also discovered that, in his current form, he was powerless.

In his shock at their discovery, Remus made a classical mistake. He agreed to let Padfoot handle the matter of Wormtail and the strange furry/scaly baby thing called Voldemort.

Wizengamot Chambers, Emergency Session, December 4th...

"My Lord, my ladies, please, if you will allow, I'll ask the Minister to address your questions," said a besieged Tiberius Ogden, the new Chief Warlock.

The chamber settled into a sullen silence. Just two days ago, the Ministry had announced plans to attack the dragons at the Shetland Island reserve in the hopes of obtaining desperately needed dragon stock. But if the press were to be believed, the dragons vanished right in front of the eyes of the aurors and press!

The situation was becoming critical. St. Mungo's was completely out of dragon based potion ingredients and a number of industries were in a bad way. Ollivander had more than doubled the price on all of his heartstring based wands.

Minister Fudge reluctantly stood from his seat and took to the floor. He glanced up at Ogden, who was a political ally of his, and wished it was still Dumbledore. At least he could attempt to lay the blame at Dumbledore's feet, but he couldn't do that to an ally and hope to survive for long in this business!

Fudge looked out at the assembled nobles of the Wizarding World and sighed. There was no getting out of this.

"My Lords and ladies, as you are now aware, two days ago your aurors attempted to obtain badly needed dragon stock from the Shetland Island Reserve. When they approached the herd, the dragons vanished right before their eyes.

"The unspeakables who were present to help the aurors have found no clue as to how the dragons vanished. They do not recognize the form of transportation used and testing for residues of apparation or portkeys turned up no trace of their use.

"With the loss of the dragons at the reserve and the stoppage of dragon stocks from Gringotts, we are unable to maintain current levels of critical potion stocks or the other supplies needed for various industries. We have spoken with every country in the world about importing what we need and, with the sole exception of the reserve in Tibet, all of the reserves have been abandoned by their countries.

"As you are aware, the Tibetan reserve is not a typical reserve. It's the only reserve in the world where the dragons roam freely about and are not harvested. The people running the reserve have made claims for years that dragons did not deserve to be treated like the mindless beasts they are.

"Attempts to obtain any dragon stock from Tibet have been soundly rebuffed by the Tibetan ministry. Faced with this information, I have ordered our Department of Mysteries to immediately begin research on finding replacements for various potion ingredients."

He paused and took a deep breath. "Members of the Wizengamot, to be frank, I'm not sure what else we can do at this juncture. Our dragons are gone, and I can only assume that Gringotts has also lost theirs as well."

"Untrue!" shouted Antonius Yaxley.

Fudge stopped speaking and turned to the old man. "Sir? If you have information to share, please do so."

Yaxley pushed himself to his feet and looked down at the Minister. "Only yesterday I needed to visit my family vaults. The oldest vaults in Gringotts are still guarded by dragons! I had to wait until a dragon was moved across the track before I could continue the trip to my vault."

Fudge looked thoughtful. "Thank you, Lord Yaxley. We did not know Gringotts still had their dragons. I will send them a note demanding they explain why they have halted all shipments of dragon products."

Fudge looked extremely relieved. Here was something he could do and hopefully it would solve the problem! He glanced over to Ogden, who nodded.

"I think we should give the ministry time to approach the Goblins and find out why they have halted dragon shipments. Also, the Department of Mysteries needs time to research replacements for important dragon stocks. Even if the Goblins can supply them, we do not want to be reliant on those creatures."

A rumble of approval echoed through the chambers and Ogden flicked his wand. A large calendar appeared. "With the Yule Holidays upon us, we should break and wait until the new year to hear from the Ministry of their progress."

The chamber lit up with wands lighting in agreement and Ogden looked around happily. "Very well, we shall meet again on January 16."

Down on the chamber floor, Fudge heaved a sigh of relief. He had over a month to work on this. It was time to light a fire under people.

Glen Catacol, Isle of Arran, off the coast of Britain, December 5th...

Harry slid off Momnarth's shoulder and dropped lightly to the ground. He looked around carefully before walking over to the gate to attach another payment.

Behind him, Momnarth faded from view as her own latent magic made her inconspicuous to anyone unless she wanted to be seen. She eagerly eyed the herd of animals.

Harry took out a bundle of bills and wrapped them in parchment. As usual, he included a short note apologizing and hoping he was leaving enough money. Once he had the money securely tied off, he'd call Dobby to come get the flock.

"Make no sudden movements, laddie," said a voice.

Harry sucked in a sharp breath.

"Weyrleader!" exclaimed Momnarth. She had been so busy eying the herd of beasts that she hadn't picked up on other humans nearby.

"Wait, remain hidden," Harry said desperately. He didn't want the dragon to be seen unless absolutely necessary.

"I'm not a thief," Harry said, raising his hands slowly.

"We know, laddie, but me laird would like to speak to you anyway. Around these parts, folks tend to buy and sell during the daylight," replied the voice. "Now, turn around, nice and easy."

Harry turned to see a pair of men standing nearby, one held a long object. Then a nearby land rover lit up its headlights and Harry could see the man was holding a shotgun. He swallowed nervously as the old man continued to hold him at gun point. His companion stepped forward and patted him down. He never noticed his wand in a holster attached to his forearm.

Stepping back, the younger man nodded. "He's clean, Da."

Angus McNulty nodded and waved to the lone occupant of the Land Rover. The man stepped out and walked over to Harry, looking at him in surprise. He seemed to be shocked by Harry's apparent age.

"I'm James, Lord Mills, and these are my lands. You've been taking my sheep, and while you have paid for what you've taken, you've

made me very curious, Harry. You are Harry, aren't you?" asked the man.

"Yes, sir, I'm Harry. I'm sorry about the sheep. If I wasn't leaving enough, I can get you more," Harry blurted.

Lord Mills looked at the boy in front of him and wondered what the story was here. "All right, slow down and let's start from the beginning. Why have you been taking my sheep? And mind you, I understand you've been paying for them. What I would like to know is why, and how you managed to move so many sheep without leaving any tire tracks, or where a lad like yourself got the money from. I had some friends of mine in the government check the money you left and I know it wasn't stolen."

Harry looked uncomfortable and he scuffed one foot along the ground, wondering what he could tell the man. Clearly he had some connections, and if Harry could convince him, he might make a useful ally. It was a snap judgment call on Harry's part, but with the Wizarding World turning against them, he might find help among the muggles.

"I think you can let your hands down, Harry," Lord Mills said softly.

Lord Mills gestured to Angus, who lowered the shotgun and pointed it away from Harry.

Harry nodded and lowered his arms, then he scratched at the back of his neck for a moment, "Sir, to be honest, I'm not sure what to tell you that you'd even believe."

Lord Mills blinked at that, then turned and motioned to Mike to bring them a couple chairs from the back of the rover. Once they were set up, he sat in one and motioned for Harry to sit in another. Mike broke out a thermos with hot tea and poured some cups, which he passed around. Angus sat across from Harry, the shotgun across his lap which added to Harry's nervousness.

"Before I begin, could you please put the gun away? You're upsetting the dragon," Harry asked with a straight face.

The three men looked at Harry and started when Momnarth let loose with a grumbling growl that echoed across the valley.

Harry grinned weakly. "Honestly, we mean you no harm, but the shotgun is making me nervous and Momnarth really wants the gun put away. Really, if I meant any harm, would I have paid for the sheep?"

"Angus," Lord Mills said softly, "put the gun in the car."

Angus looked at Lord Mills incredulously, then he sighed, stood up and walked over to the land rover. He hesitated for a moment and Momnarth growled once more. The hair on the back of Angus' neck stood up and for the first time since his days in the army he felt like he was going to have an accident due to pure primal fear.

"Why do I feel like something wants to taste me?" Angus muttered.

"Oh, no, they don't eat humans anymore, sir," Harry offered, not realizing he wasn't helping matters.

"Anymore?" muttered Mike with a shiver.

"Not very reassuring," offered Lord Mills uneasily.

Harry turned his attention back to Lord Mills. "Oh, no, I'm sorry. I didn't mean to frighten you, sir. It's just that I find myself in a bad position. The only thing I can think of to prove I'm not crazy is to show you and then explain. Just that remember you're not in any danger, so please remain calm."

The three men exchanged a glance between them then Lord Mills turned back to Harry. "Well, lad, since I think it's clear that crazy is at the top of our list right now, how about you prove yourself? Then we'll talk about explanations."

Harry nodded and knew he was about to break a dozen laws in the wizarding world. Taking a deep breath, he said in a clear voice. "Momnarth, would you step into the light and let yourself be seen by our friends?"

Harry couldn't help but smile as the ground trembled with the dragon's approach. Dragons could be as light footed as a cat when they wanted to be. She was deliberately stomping on the ground to give an added effect to her approach.

"Is that really necessary?" asked Harry.

"No, but it does scare and make them nervous. This will make them uncertain and less likely to do something rash," replied Momnarth with amusement.

The large dragon slowly moved into the zone of light provided by the Land Rover's headlamps and all three men froze. Lord Mills swallowed nervously and Harry couldn't help himself. "Now do you believe me?"

Lord Mills nodded his head. He never took his gaze from the fifty two foot long dragon that, in his estimation, had to weigh as much as a fully loaded tractor trailer truck.

A small puff of smoke wafted from the mouth of the Horntail and Harry shook his head. She was hamming it up in an attempt to intimidate the men so they would not harm him.

"Momnarth," Harry chided. "I think we don't have to worry about that. Just say hello to Lord Mills here."

"Hello," the dragon said clearly in the minds of all three men.

Mike jumped and dropped his tea, spilling it on his pants leg.

Momnarth watched him dance around for a moment and started to rumble with the dragon version of laughter.

"She's just laughing," Harry said softly. "The dragons seem to find slap stick humor very funny."

"Dragons? There's more than one?" exclaimed Lord Mills. Tearing his gaze from the large dragon, he turned to look around wildly.

"There are thousands of dragons on the planet, sir," Harry replied. "They kept themselves carefully hidden for more centuries than we can count. There's a lot going on here that is very hard to explain and I'm not sure I'm the one who should be doing the explaining. Would you mind if I called for someone else to come here to help with this?"

Numbly, Lord Mills nodded. Somehow this evening had gotten away from him. What started out as an attempt to solve a mystery was turning out to be an episode of Doctor Who.

"Spath, please ask Remus to join us. Have two other dragons accompany him to my location," Harry said.

"Is everything all right, Weyrleader?" asked the ancient dragon.

"Momnarth and I are fine, but I'm here with three normal humans and I think I could use Remus to help explain our situation to them."

"We'll have some company in a moment. A good friend of mine and a few more dragons. Please don't be alarmed," Harry warned.

A moment later there was a blast of cold air from over head and three dragons landed.

Remus slid down from Spath's back and ran over to Harry. "Are you all right?" he demanded, reaching out and gripping Harry by his shoulders.

"I'm fine, Remus, but I need your help," Harry said, then he jerked his head towards the stunned muggles.

Remus looked at the three muggles and then turned back to Harry. "Harry, they can't know! What about the Secrecy laws?"

Harry scowled. "Remus, that world is trying to kill us. Lord Mills here sounds like he might be someone that can help us, or at least lead us to someone who can! Look, I have to do what's best for the dragons and right now if I can find help from the muggles, I'll take it."

Remus took a step back, surprised that Harry would assert himself so forcefully.

"The Weyrleader is right, Wolf," Spath sent to all present. "We make no distinction between one human and another. If the Weyrleader thinks these people can help, we should try."

Lord Mills watched the argument with interest. It was clear that the youth had some measure of authority that he didn't understand. What he did understand was there was an underlying problem and

even the gray haired man seemed to defer to Harry. He had also heard the other dragon speak and was struck by the realization that this wasn't a single dragon that was intelligent, but maybe a whole race of them.

"Are you guys from another planet?" blurted Mike.

Remus turned to stare at the man. "How did you?"

"Wait, wait!" Harry said, overriding Remus. "We're getting ahead of ourselves here. Lord Mills, I would like you to meet Remus Lupin. He was a close friend of my parents and I consider him family. He's also one of the smartest men I know."

Remus extended a hand and Lord Mills shook it. They simply couldn't think of anything else to do, and there really was no reason to be rude.

"Here's what's going to happen, Remus. I want you to fill in the details with Lord Mills tonight. He seems to have contacts with the muggle government. Perhaps we can get their help."

Lord Mills turned to Harry. "That's the second time you've mentioned that. Help with what?" he demanded.

Harry looked up at the dragons affectionately. "They want to kill the dragons," he said simply. "But the dragons are thinking creatures just like you and I. To my world, they are no better than your sheep - mindless beasts meant to be bred for commercial uses."

Harry turned to Lord Mills and his eyes blazed with magic fed by his anger. "They are intelligent, thinking beings, they love in their own unique way. There is a huge story here, but I don't think it deserves to be told in the middle of a field."

"No, no, you're right. Would you two like to join us at my house nearby?" asked Lord Mills.

Harry and Remus exchanged a glance, then Harry turned to the dragons. "You guys can return to the weyr. I'll call when we're ready to return."

"I am not leaving you, Weyrleader," Momnarth replied stubbornly. "These men are trustworthy for now, but they may change their minds."

Harry sighed. "Fine, Mom, just don't be seen by anyone." When Remus looked at Harry, he shrugged. "Momnarth's unhappy leaving me. She's going to follow and keep an eye on things."

Remus nodded with a hint of smirk. Momnarth was extremely protective of Harry, and while he chafed a bit under that protection, he knew better than to fight her.

Mills Manor, Isle of Arran, December 6th ...

Harry woke to a smell he hadn't smelled in weeks - cooking bacon. Dobby had managed to see to the needs of feeding Hagrid and the others, but he usually just helped himself to something already precooked from Hogwarts instead of making it at the weyr. Of course they had no real cooking facilities, so that contributed to the additional thievery.

"Good morning, Momnarth. Is everything well?"

"Good morning, Weyrleader. Several of the men in this place left earlier, but I don't detect any bad intentions on the part of any men remaining here," Momnarth replied. She was perched on the roof of the dwelling and was carefully hiding herself while making sure she didn't cave the roof in with her weight. Dragons could be as heavy or as light as they wanted to be. It was another facet of their inherent magic, although Remus was unsure now if it was magic or just an ability of the dragons.

Harry nodded. "Very well. Speak to Spath and make sure there's a wing ready in case trouble does develop. I don't think it will, but it's better to be prepared."

"Yes, Weyrleader."

Harry stretched and put his clothing back on from yesterday. They had stayed up very late explaining the situation to Lord Mills and his two men. In fact, it was nearly 2am when Remus noted Harry was yawning like crazy and suggested he get some sleep. He really

didn't know how long the others stayed up talking after he went to the bedroom Mike had shown him.

Following his nose, he stumbled into the kitchen, still sleepily scratching at his head. A pleasant looking woman stood in front of the stove, watching the bacon cook. At a nearby table sat a girl about Harry's age. He didn't recognize her, but he did recognize the two men with her.

The woman at the stove smiled at him. "Take a seat and I'll have eggs and bacon ready in just a bit."

James Mills looked up when Harry entered and he smiled in greeting. "Good morning, lad. I hope you slept well. Come help yourself to some breakfast."

Harry slipped into a chair next to Lord Mills and reached for the pot of tea. "Good morning," he mumbled. "Has Remus gotten up yet?"

James shook his head. "No, but we were up late last night. And in all of the ruckus from last night, I never got around to introducing you to the others." He pointed with one mug filled hand. "That's Angus McNulty, my game keeper. You also met Mike, his son. The young lass staring at you from across the table is May. She's Angus' granddaughter. Rosie, her mother, is at the stove, making you a plate of eggs and bacon."

James turned back to Harry, "May, this young man is Harry..." He paused and looked at Harry expectantly.

It took him a moment to realize he never told them his last name. "Harry Potter, sir," he replied quietly. He glanced at the girl, May. She had green eyes like his and a piercing look that really disconcerted him. She had dark blond hair which she wore in a pony tail. Harry couldn't help but notice she was rather curvy.

"Harry Potter," James repeated softly. "Welcome to our home. Remus and I still have a lot to talk about but I think I have a general idea of the problem. Later today I'm going to contact some people I know. I'm afraid you'll have to demonstrate your abilities, probably several times, Harry, but we need to convince some very important people."

Harry nodded gratefully. He had missed a lot of the conversation it seemed, but Remus must have done a good job of getting the important points across.

"Uncle James? What's going on?" asked May.

"Now, girl, what did I tell ye 'bout mindin' yer own business?" asked Angus.

"Angus, May wouldn't tell anyone. Besides, if we're going to hold these kinds of conversations in front of her she is going to become curious."

"Weyrleader?"

"Yes, Momnarth," replied Harry.

"The girl could be a rider."

Harry froze and looked up at the ceiling. "Are you sure?" he blurted.

"Any human with enough sensitivity can be a rider, Weyrleader. They don't have to be wizards."

Harry shook himself and turned to look at Lord Mills as if he were looking for direction from the older man.

James shrugged. "I take it from your look that Momnarth had something to say? I didn't notice it last night, but this morning in the light you get a glassy look when you're speaking with her."

"But, Uncle James, he didn't say anything!" exclaimed May.

Harry closed his eyes and shivered slightly. This was another part of his job, finding potential riders. He had been ignoring it because there were other, more important issues to deal with.

"You'll be dealing with Remus this morning, sir?" he asked.

"Harry, call me James, please. And yes, I'll talk with Remus. He and I are already planning out how to get my government involved," James replied.

Harry nodded, "Very good. If Mr. McNulty has no objections, I'll explain to May what is going on. Momnarth says she has the potential to be a rider, like me."

May looked surprised, but she had been watching the conversation flow back and forth and knew there was a lot that wasn't being said. The concept of Dragon Riders had been one aspect of the conversation that Harry had been awake for.

"Girl," Angus said after moments thought, "you be listening to the lad. But remember that this is Mills business and we don't speak of such without permission."

"Yes, sir," she replied meekly, then she shot Harry a shy smile.

Satisfied, Angus went back to his breakfast. He still had some fences to check and maybe repair before the snows came. His lord would worry about the dragons. All he had wanted was to solve the mystery of the missing flocks. That done, it was time to get back to work.

James watched the two teens and smiled to himself. According to Remus, Harry had been cooped up with nothing but dragons and adults for the past month. Another teen would do him good, and May had a good head on her shoulders. She wouldn't get into any trouble.

After breakfast, Harry walked out of the manor with May following close behind. "Is there a place we can talk without other people around?" he asked.

She looked at him oddly and he blushed. "I mean a field or someplace where others won't see?"

She stared at him for a moment longer, noting that his eyes were a much brighter green than her own. It was almost as though they were lit from within. Shaking her head at her thoughts, she pointed. "There's a spot about 100 yards up the road."

Harry nodded and motioned for her to show him the way. "Momnarth, would you meet us there?" he asked.

She turned and looked at him. She couldn't see anyone but him. "Who are you talking to?"

He chuckled and shook his head. "If I told you, you wouldn't believe me. That's why I need to show you."

She looked at him oddly and wondered just what he was going on about. She wasn't getting the usual signals that she usually got from the local boys.

"What if I was to tell you there is a whole world living right alongside of your own, but hidden from you? A world full of magic with creatures like unicorns and dragons." He asked.

May chuckled. "I'd say you've been sipping from Grandda's private whiskey."

Harry laughed ruefully. He had listened to Remus give this same talk last night. "I'm not drunk. Tired perhaps, but not drunk. What I am going to tell you sounds unbelievable, but it's true. And as soon as we get to your private spot, I'll show you."

May decided to humor him. "All right, but I'll have you know the last boy that tried to lure me into a private spot ended up losing three teeth."

Harry looked shocked and he blushed brightly. "No, I have no intent like that, honest! What I have to show you isn't like that."

She nodded and lengthened her pace. The field was just up beyond the bend in the road, and because it was a private road, the odds of anyone driving by were slim at best. Once they reached the field, she walked over to a stump and sat, watching Harry. "Well?"

Harry fidgeted for a moment, then he pulled his wand. "There is a whole world hidden from you May. A world of magic and magical creatures," he said softly. As he spoke he was setting dozens of rocks around them floating. Her eyes widened at the display. "Like your world, there are parts that are very good, and parts that are very bad. People are still the same, even those who can use magic. Lord Mills is helping me because I know something that my world wants deny. If they could, they would destroy me to prevent what I know from spreading."

"What do you know?" whispered May in awe. The floating rocks had seriously unnerved her.

"My world is filled with wonders and terrors," Harry said softly in reply. "Unicorns and Centaurs, Mermaids and Dragons, Basilisks, Gorgons, they all exist. But until recently, we thought dragons were dangerous. They aren't, not unless they want to be. They are as smart as you or I and have a long, rich history."

Harry turned to face her. "Momnarth, would you reveal yourself please?"

Momnarth faded into view directly behind Harry. May took one look, gasped and her eyes rolled up in her head before she slumped over. Harry sprang forward and caught her before she hit the ground. He held her and cast an enervate to wake her.

Momnarth rumbled with amusement and Harry shot her a small grin. She hadn't meant to scare the girl into fainting, but having done just that, it was funny to the dragon. Harry turned his attention back to the girl in his arms. The dragons had a twisted sense of humor that featured a lot of rather juvenile pranks and jokes – which explained why Sirius fit in so well. It was an issue he'd have to warn every potential rider about.

The dragons thought a fart was immensely funny. Harry thought they were just short of chemical warfare.

May blinked her eyes a few times and she looked around. She noted that Harry was holding her just before she spotted the twirling eyes of Momnarth, whose head was as big as one of Lord Mills' horses. Her eyes widened and she took a deep breath to scream when Harry cut her off.

"Momnarth wouldn't dream of hurting you, May," he said intently. "She says that you could be like me, a rider. You have the sensitivity required."

Harry gestured to Momnarth, who brought her huge head even closer. He reached out to scratch along one eye ridge and the large dragon crooned with pleasure. May sat up and Harry moved away from her. He nodded when she reached tentatively for the large dragon, ever mindful of the mouth full of six inch long razor sharp

teeth. Carefully, she copied Harry's movements and smiled at the dragon's reaction.

"Thank you," Momnarth said clearly in her mind. May froze for a moment, then turned to Harry.

"She spoke to me! I could clearly hear her!" she exclaimed.

Harry nodded and conjured a stump of his own to sit on. "Dragons can speak to anyone they choose, but it takes a special person to become a dragon rider, May. Someday, if you're lucky, a dragon will look at you and find you acceptable to be a rider."

"What does it mean to be a rider?"

Harry's gaze grew distant. "If a dragon chooses you to be their rider, you will find yourself bound mentally and physically to your dragon and you will know without a doubt that someone in this world loves you above everything else."

He turned to her with an intent expression. "Love between people doesn't even come close to what a dragon and his rider share. I take care of Chekiath, my dragon, and he takes care of me. Between people in love, they think they know how the other person feels. Between a dragon and their rider, they know how the other feels. It is a relationship so intense and so strong that usually if one of a pair dies, the other will commit suicide to follow their mate."

"We live for our riders, and they for us," added Momnarth.

"And I can be a rider?" asked May incredulously.

"You have what it takes to be a rider, but it is up to the hatchling to choose. None of us can say if you will be chosen or not."

May stared up at Momnarth for a moment, then she turned back to Harry. "How do you fit into all this? Isn't that other man a rider?"

"He is Weyrleader," Momnarth said firmly. "He leads and protects us. Wolf is a good friend and advisor, but he is not a rider."

Harry looked embarrassed. "I'm the first rider in thousands of years. By impressing Chekiath, I caused the dragons to remember what they once were. Now they consider me to be their leader."

May looked at him in surprise. "Will you let me try to... what was the word? Impress?"

Harry smiled gently back at the girl. "May, I have no intention of denying you or anyone else a chance to impress. But there won't be a new clutch of eggs for a few more months. Right, Momnarth?"

"It is true, Weyrleader," Momnarth rumbled, then she eyed May for a moment. "This one is strong. I think she would make a good rider."

May smiled and turned back to Harry. She still had tons of questions for him. Harry relaxed and casually flicked his wand, casting a warming charm on the area. May looked surprised as the charm took effect, then she relaxed a little more. This boy wasn't like Johnny Morrigan, who just wanted to get into her knickers. Harry seemed to be interested in getting to know her. She didn't understand that Harry was somewhat starved for someone of his own age to talk to.

What Harry wanted most of all was something she wouldn't mind giving. He wanted and needed a friend his own age.

Headmaster's Office, Hogwarts, December 8th...

Dumbledore stared down at the paper in dismay. While he might be getting things under control here at Hogwarts, things elsewhere were rapidly spiraling out of control. Harry Potter had been tried and sentenced to Azkaban for his part in the Dragon Crisis that now confronted the Wizarding World.

The Minister was trying to offset the bad press he had received over the aborted attempt to kill the dragons at Shetland Island.

The fact that no one knew where Potter was seemed to be swept under the rug, along with the fact that condemning a fourteen year old boy to prison didn't have any impact on the crisis. The Ministry, as usual, was trying to make itself look good by appearing to do something, even if that something didn't help the situation at all.

The Ministry had tried to reinstate its controls on the school, but Albus had been able to hold them off. The simple fact was that he held control of the most formidable wards in Britain and if he didn't want to give up that control, there was no way they could wrest control from him.

A knock at the door drew his attention from the paper. "Come!"

The door opened and Minerva entered. "Good afternoon, Professor," he said with a smile. She was one of the few members of staff who seemed to agree completely with his decision to invoke the code of conduct for the students.

"Headmaster," she replied with an austere smile. "I wouldn't be bothering you, but I've had reports from a number of students today that Alastor Moody has failed to show up for any of his classes."

Albus frowned and reached for the wards, checking them thoroughly. "Strange. The wards say he's in the castle, but they can only tell me if he's here, not his physical condition. Perhaps he wasn't feeling well?"

Minerva frowned. "Then he should have followed procedure, Albus, and contacted me. At a minimum, he could have sent an elf with a message, or asked Madam Pomfrey to tell me if he were sick."

Albus smiled at her. "Minerva you and I both know that Alastor wouldn't go to Poppy or any other healer unless he was on his death bed. It's too late to do anything for today and we are going into a weekend. If I haven't seen Alastor by Sunday, I will send a elf asking about him."

Minerva nodded, relieved that she wouldn't be asked to visit the grizzled old Auror. She didn't mind Alastor most of the time, but his constant shouting got on her nerves.

"So tell me, Professor, how fares your house?"

She leaned back slightly in her chair. "They are relieved for the most part, I think. Catching Mr. Nott and expelling him did an awful lot to ease the tensions in the school."

Theodore Nott had been responsible for several vicious attacks on muggle born on the way to and from the Care of Magical Creatures class. Everyone thought Malfoy to be the culprit, but he had been strangely subdued since the task and not responsible for the attacks. Nott noticed Malfoy's preoccupation and decided to step up to the task in a bid for control of Slytherin house.

Dumbledore had been at wits end to find out who was responsible when he hit upon the idea of using some elves to monitor the path and report back to him. As a result, he managed to catch Mr. Nott red handed.

Albus had been incensed. A student had several broken bones and would be forced to undergo the very painful Skelegrow treatment, and all Nott had to say for himself was that his fellow student had deserved it for being a "stupid mudblood". Dumbledore waited until dinner, then called Mr. Nott to the head table, where he personally snapped his wand and bound his magic, then turned the crying teen over to a steaming Snape to be escorted home.

Snape had been livid, but it resulted in a relieved student body, as the attacks along the unprotected areas ceased. Dumbledore had taken a hard stand against bullying in all forms and most of the staff and students were glad he did.

The day after Nott's expulsion, his father showed up at the castle demanding a duel with Dumbledore. Albus reluctantly agreed and put the man down with just two spells, once again reinforcing his image as an extremely powerful wizard who wasn't to be trifled with. News of the duel spread like wildfire and many parents of the hardline students sent letters to their children commanding them to do nothing to invoke the wrath of the man they feared above all others.

If Voldemort had been afraid of Dumbledore, he was the boogeyman to his followers.

"I must say, Professor, I never thought I'd see the day you'd be so strict," Minerva said softly. "Even some of the Slytherins seem to be changing their ways because of it. Malfoy seems almost meek these days."

Dumbledore grimaced. "I don't want to be so strict, Minerva, but too many of our problems have been of our own making. I made a huge mistake in being too lenient and that cost us Harry Potter. I will not allow another student to suffer conditions here so bad as to think suicide is a better option.

"As for young Malfoy, I'm not sure if it's my actions or another reason which has caused such a drastic change in the lad. Whatever the reason, however, I welcome it. I actually saw him the other day explaining a potions problem to a first year Hufflepuff."

Minerva nodded, seeing his point. She had her own share of grief and guilt over what happened to Harry.

"Speaking of Harry, have you heard anything new?"

"Alas, I have not. I have been making sure that Fawkes delivers the paper to Remus on a daily basis, but I have not heard much since my meeting with him and Hagrid. The Wizengamot has issued an arrest warrant for Mr. Potter and frankly, I fear if they ever manage to get their hands on him, the crisis will only get worse."

"Anything more from the Ministry?"

Albus shook his head. "No. I believe they are too busy to worry about the school. They made one halfhearted attempt to wrest control of the school and found the wards preventing them from even entering the grounds. The Board of Governors is a new invention and not recognized by the charter at all, so they have no control on the wards. Only the Headmaster has control and if you go by the charter then it's up to me to pick a successor. Should something happen to prevent me from picking a successor, the sorting hat has the ability to pick one, or not to pick one."

"The hat?" exclaimed Minerva.

Albus smiled. "Ultimately, the hat is an expression of Hogwarts, my dear. The school will only accept a headmaster it feels will work for the good of her students."

Minerva's thin lips pressed into an austere smile. "Somehow I find that idea comforting."

Albus nodded. "As do I, Professor. As do I."

He picked up a piece of parchment and slid it toward Minerva, "These are the plans for the Yule Ball. Make sure the Heads of House know, so that they may announce it. The students will need to make plans."

She nodded and took the parchment, then stood and left the office.

Albus stared after her for some time, wondering what new problems would walk through the door next.

Ministry of Magic, office of the Minister, December 9th...

"Sir? The American Attache is asking to meet with you," his secretary said from the doorway.

Cornelius Fudge looked up in annoyance. "Do I have the time? I'm a very busy man, you know!"

She smirked at him and he vowed to see her either fired, or bent over his desk later today, then he'd oblivate her, as usual. "Yes, sir. You have no appointments scheduled today."

He frowned. That couldn't be right. He had to be seen working on the dragon crisis! But then, some free time would be useful if he intend to deal with his secretary.

"Very well, send him in," he said with a huff.

A man walked into the room and immediately Cornelius felt intimidated. The man was very tall and powerfully muscled. He held out a hand and smiled at Cornelius. "Sir, I'm sorry we haven't met before this, but I'm new to the posting. My name is Jason Walking Cloud, Attache for the American Department of Magic at our Embassy in London."

Cornelius shook the man's hand and mentally counted his fingers, then he motioned to a chair. "It's quite all right, Mr. Walking Cloud. How can we help our cousins overseas?"

Walking Cloud hid his frown. He had long years of experience in dealing with people and knew better than to show any signs of

annoyance over the Minister's condescending attitude. Cousins, indeed! Walking Cloud was a full blooded Sioux and was proud of the fact that there was no European blood in his family line. Such distinction would be wasted on this oaf, however, so he let it slide.

"Minister, yesterday we apprehended a British national who was delivered to us via dragon. The man was dropped in the main lobby of our DMLE building, bound and apparently overdosed on Veritaserum.

"When some officers approached after the dragon left, we noted he wore a sign around his neck declaring him to be a terrorist and to ask him about Sirius Black."

Cornelius sat up straight. "This is wonderful news! Let me call Madam Bones. She's the Head of our DMLE and I'm sure she'll be delighted to know any information you might have on Black."

Fudge pressed a crystal on his desk, which summoned Amelia to his office.

"Ska sunka," Walking Cloud muttered. When Cornelius smiled weakly, he shook his head, realizing the man had no idea that he's just been insulted. The fool didn't know what information he had and all he was doing was inviting in a witness.

The door opened and Madam Bones stepped into the room. "You sent for me, Cornelius?"

"Ah, Amelia. Excellent! Now we can get this going. Amelia, meet Jamison Cloud Walker, an American from their embassy."

Amelia looked surprised, then turned to the tall man.

"Jason Walking Cloud, Magical Attache and former DMLE section chief," Walking Cloud said through slightly gritted teeth, holding out a hand.

"Yes, yes," Fudge said impatiently. "Amelia, our friend here has information on Sirius Black."

Amelia's eyes narrowed and she nodded. "Please, sir, I'm very interested in hearing what you have to say."

Walking Cloud looked uncomfortable. "As I started to explain to Minister Fudge, yesterday we had someone deliver a British national to the lobby of our DMLE building. The man was stripped down to his boxers, so the dark mark on his arm was quite visible. We knew immediately we were dealing with a member of that terrorist gang you put down a few years back.

"Anyway, he had a sign around his neck which read 'I am a terrorist, ask me about Sirius Black'"

He paused for a moment to see if Amelia was following along. When she nodded, he continued. "As one would expect, one of our people read that sign aloud, which started the man talking. It was then that we realized that he'd been doped up on a near lethal dose of Veritaserum. Naturally, we summoned a stenographer to record what he was saying."

Walking Cloud reached into his brief case and removed a thick file. "We have several questions that we'd like your government to answer," he said, handing the file to Amelia. "For one thing, how is it that Sirius Orion Black is wanted for a crime he was never convicted for? And why was Peter Pettigrew, whom we thought was dead, dumped on our doorstep? We were informed that he was a war hero, not a member of your Dark Lord's army.

"We also discovered that Black didn't kill anyone and he wasn't the Potter's Secret Keeper."

Minister Fudge paled and Amelia quickly thumbed through the file Walking Cloud had handed her.

"Minister, my government requests a copy of the transcript for Black's trial. I have been told that if you can't produce it without undue difficulty that I am thing to inform you that we cannot and will not honor the international warrant you have out on Black. Copies of the file I gave Madam Bones are being given to other governments even as I speak. They will then decide on their own what to do with the information. However, I do know that should Sirius Black turn up on American soil, he will most likely be granted asylum under our political refugee laws."

"But you can't do that," protested Fudge. "We have a kill on sight order out on Black. I signed it myself! I demand you turn Pettigrew over to us immediately. It's obvious you have illegally interrogated him."

"Minister, Peter Pettigrew is a member of a terrorist organization that committed acts of murder on American soil, as well as your own. He is being charged with conspiracy and will be tried in our courts. I will, of course, submit your request to my government concerning Mr. Pettigrew, but I doubt there won't be much left of him when we're done with him."

"How badly was he dosed, Mr. Walking Cloud?" asked Amelia.

"As I said, it was a near lethal dose. His ability to lie has been utterly destroyed. I'm sure you're aware that a Veritaserum overdose either kills the victim or permanently impair their ability to lie. Whoever captured him knew what they were doing."

Amelia nodded. "Would it be possible for us to send someone over to ask him some questions?"

"Absolutely not!" exclaimed Fudge. "I won't have it. This is clearly an American attempt to make this government look bad."

Walking Cloud stood and looked down at Fudge. "I will convey your comments to my government, sir. Perhaps you might want to rethink your position. It will soon become public knowledge that we have Pettigrew and his story will be told in our courts."

Walking Cloud turned to Amelia. "Madam Bones, it was a pleasure to finally meet you."

Fudge and Bones watched him walk out of the room in silence.

After a moment, Fudge leaned back in his chair and breathed a heavy sigh. "This is a catastrophe for us! Pettigrew captured on American soil? Black innocent? I'll have to make sure that the Daily Prophet has the true story. You'll back me up on this won't you, Amelia? I mean, this makes your department look almost as bad as it makes me look!"

Amelia Bones stared at the man for a long moment and he slowly quailed back from her icy glare. "I will pretend you did not ask me to lie to cover your tracks, Cornelius. I was not department head when Black was captured and if I can't find a trial transcript, I will publicly point the finger at the true culprits."

Fudge stared at her in dismay and for the millionth time since he took office he wished his DMLE head hadn't earned the nickname of Iron Pants by being honest to a fault.

Between this and the dragon crisis, his career was looking very shaky.

"Oh, bugger," he moaned, before lowering his head into his hands. Amelia snorted and stormed from the room.

Private Quarters Wing, Hogwarts, December 10th...

Dumbledore stood in front of the open door and looked decidedly unhappy. He was waiting for Minerva to arrive. She had left a little before to fetch Amelia Bones and the Aurors that had been summoned to the castle.

Albus looked up when they entered the corridor and he nodded in greeting. "Amelia, thank you for coming. I fear that we have need of your services."

Amelia looked at him silently for a moment, then motioned to the two people behind her. "This is Senior Auror Kingsley Shacklebolt and I'm sure you remember Nymphadora Tonks, now Auror Basic Tonks. What seems to be the problem, Dumbledore? You were rather vague on the floo."

Minerva smiled at the metamorph. She had worked closely with her during her school years to help train her talent.

Tonks returned the smile and then turned her attention back on her boss. She was a little awed by Dumbledore and a little intimidated.

Dumbledore looked decidedly unhappy. "I fear something very bad has happened. A few days ago our defense teacher, Alastor Moody, didn't show up for class. You know Alastor well enough, Amelia.

Even if he were sick, he wouldn't go to a healer unless he was ordered to do so."

"Yes, Alastor was like that," murmured Amelia in agreement.

"I decided to give him a few days before checking up on him. Honestly, I thought he was just down with a cold or something. But he hasn't been seen in nearly four days now," Dumbledore continued. "I came down to his quarters and used my Headmaster's override to open the door."

Dumbledore made a sour face. "I didn't go inside. There is a rather unpleasant odor in the room that I recognize. Something is rotting in there. Considering the problems we've been having this year, I decided that it would be best if you would accompany me inside to see what is going on."

Amelia nodded, then cast a bubble head charm on herself. Dumbledore, Minerva and the two aurors copied her casting, then followed her into the room.

The room was a mess, which in itself was unusual for Moody, who preferred things to be neatly arranged in a very specific manner. The man's paranoia meant he often deliberately stacked items neatly so he could tell if they had been disturbed while he was absent.

"Look at all the potion bottles," exclaimed Auror Tonks. Along one wall was a large bookcase stuffed with bottles. Tonks pulled one bottle down and put it inside the bubble around her head so she could sniff it. "Ugh, I don't recognize it, but it smells terrible."

Albus held out a hand. "May I?"

Handing the bottle over to the Headmaster, she watched as he took a single whiff and scowled.

"Polyjuice. It's unbound at the moment and ready to be used once it's bound."

He handed the bottle back to Tonks, who corked it and put it back on the shelf.

Amelia looked around grimly. "Auror Tonks, lift some fingerprints from these bottles. Perhaps we'll get some usable prints from an unpolyjuiced source."

"Yes, Ma'am," Tonks replied, then she pulled out her wand and cast a spell which caused dozens of fingerprints to appear on the bottles.

"Director?" Shacklebolt called.

"Yes, Kingsley?"

"I think I have the source of the smell. It seems to be coming from this trunk," the tall man said, pointing at a trunk in one corner.

"There's no sign of Alastor, and yet the wards say he's still in the castle," Dumbledore commented. "I fear what we will find inside."

Amelia nodded grimly then turned back to Shacklebolt. She motioned for him to continue and he nodded, then knelt and tried to open the trunk. It was locked. He pulled his wand and cast a complex charm on the lock, causing it to pop open with a metallic thunk. He threw the lid open and stepped back. Even through the bubble head charm the smell was noticeable.

Amelia lit the end of her wand and shined it into the trunk. It was a spatially distorted trunk, much larger on the inside than the outside. At the bottom of the trunk, nearly ten feet below, lay Alastor Moody. He had been dead for at least a week.

"I had prayed this wasn't the case," Albus murmured. "Poor Alastor."

Minerva gasped and stared in horror at the figure. He had been bound and gagged. His passing had not been an easy one,, judging by the cuts on his wrists and ankles.

Amelia turned to the pair of professors. "I'm going to have to ask you to leave the room. This is now a crime scene investigation."

Dumbledore nodded slowly. "I will be in my office when you need to speak to me, Amelia. I hate to lose Alastor as a friend, but now I must give thought to replacing him as defense instructor."

Amelia nodded and waited for the two professors to leave before turning to Tonks. "Find a public floo and call the office. Tell them I said to send a forensic group to our location."

Tonks nodded. She'd be happy to leave the foul smelling room.

Two hours later, Amelia joined Dumbledore and McGonagall in the Headmaster's office. Both were drinking tea heavily fortified with a shot of fire whiskey. As she settled into a chair, an elf appeared and offered her a cup.

She took a whiff and arched an eyebrow at Dumbledore, then lifted it to her mouth.

"Alastor might have had his eccentricities, but he was a good friend," Albus said softly. "I will miss him."

"I think we all will, but this does give us an important clue in another mystery," Amelia replied.

"What's that?" asked Minerva.

"Neither Ludo Bagman nor Barty Crouch were capable of spelling your Goblet of Fire. Who ever was impersonating Moody must have been the same person controlling Crouch and the person responsible for putting the enchantment on the Goblet."

"I wonder why?" mused Minerva.

Amelia shrugged. "Without apprehending and questioning the person, I doubt we'll ever know."

Albus nodded knowingly. He had long since given up on finding out why Harry's name came out of the Goblet.

Amelia placed her tea down and stood. "We have removed Alastor and all of the effects from that room for complete examination. Now, I understand that you're now short a defense teacher. If you're interested, I can give you the names of some recent retirees who might be interested in the position."

Dumbledore looked up with interest. He had not been looking forward to another fruitless search for a Defense Professor.

December, 10th, The Dragon History, Volume Two...

"It's important to understand just how much riders mean to us, Wolf," Spath said.

"I think I understand," Remus said carefully.

"Do you, Wolf? Do you really? While it is unthinkable to you, do you know that should Chekiath go Between, the Weyrleader will likely kill himself?" Spath said harshly. "A non-rider cannot understand the pain of loss or the joy of the bond. But look for yourself, Wolf. See what riders mean to us."

Once again the pensieve like feeling hit Remus and he recognized Sidraneth as she watched and crooned encouragement. Remus turned away from the great Queen after noting her dull gold, almost brown coloring. He looked out at the vast field of eggs that were rocking violently back and forth and understood. She had neglected herself in order to protect her eggs from this alien environment.

Suddenly an egg broke open and a large bronze hatchling stepped from his shell, bleating. He looked around, expecting to find humans, but all he saw were other eggs, some injured animals for him to feed on and a large adult.

He turned to the adult. "Sidraneth, where is he? I need my rider!"

Sidraneth turned to face her offspring. "You must be brave, Granth. There are no people in this place and there is no way of getting home."

Granth slowly sank to the floor of the hatching Weyr and moaned piteously, but he was one of the lucky ones. Ten of his siblings, upon hearing that there were no life-mates to be found, immediately made the jump Between.

"Children, hear me!" Sidraneth called, her voice laced with sorrow. "If we are to survive in this place we must eat and work together for the sake of our lives."

Remus walked among the memory of so many hatchlings and noted that this batch had a very large number of queens and bronzes.

Sidraneth had laid nearly one hundred eggs, of which they had twenty bronzes and five queens.

He shivered as he walked. The despair he felt was palatable. It hung like a miasma over the hatchlings as the reality of life without riders sunk into their consciousness.

Suddenly he was back among the contemporary dragons on Disko Island. "Do you see now, Wolf? Can you still wonder why we yearn to return to the days of the riders?"

Remus sat down on the warm rocks and nodded in stunned silence. "You were created to have a human partner," he said softly. "Everything in you is geared towards that and those little hatchlings jumped Between because they were told they couldn't have what they needed."

"It is who we are. Now, perhaps, you will understand why the Weyrleader is so important to us. He has shown us that he will protect us and he willingly dedicates his life to us," Spath said. "We can, literally, do no less. It is who we are."

Remus nodded. "I understand, Spath, and I will help him in any way I can."

Spath looked at him with twirling eyes of blue. "We know, Wolf, and the Weyr is grateful for your help."

Mills Manor, Isle of Arran, December 15th ...

Remus stood, waiting with James Mills for Sir Robert March, the chief government scientific advisor, to arrive. James had been working diligently to get someone from the government to help with their problem. He had finally settled on Sir Robert. The man had the ear of the Crown and the Prime Minister, and he was uniquely suited to understand their problems, if he could be convinced that they weren't all nuts.

Remus recalled the conversation he'd had with Lord Mills only a few days ago, which he tried to describe how he was approaching the problem.

"You see, Remus, I can't just go to the PM and say that I've discovered intelligent dragons! For one thing, I'm just a minor member of Parliament, and while that might be enough to get me an appointment in about three months, he'd just laugh me out of his office! No, we need to take a more structured approach. I need to convince someone with more pull than I have, so that they may help us convince the PM."

Remus nodded appreciatively, understanding the reasoning involved. "Yes, I can see that."

"Sir Robert is the chief governmental scientific advisor. He answers to the Crown and to the PM. Sir Robert is a scientist, Remus.. He deals with cold hard facts in almost every facet of his life, except one."

Remus cocked an eyebrow. The man sounded like a stickler for details and not prone to believing in unusual things. "Oh?"

James leaned back on his chair and took a sip of tea. "Nearly every scientist in the last fifty years has given thought to the idea of 'first contact'. And that's how we'll pull Sir Robert in. I can't imagine any scientist willingly turning down the opportunity to be the first to meet a new, intelligent species."

Remus shook his head. "I'm sorry. First contact?"

James smiled regally. Now the shoe was on the other foot and he'd get to explain something to this unusual man he was coming to like very much. "First contact is a general term for what we would call meeting another intelligent species. It was always assumed that the intelligent species would be from another planet, but why can't it be from our own?"

"Even the most pragmatic scientist in the world has dreamed of being present – hell, just being alive for first contact," James concluded. "Sir Robert is no different. He even worked on the protocols for first contact here in the UK and how the government should handle it."

Remus silently chuckled. At first he'd thought the idea of aliens was a bit crazy, but then he realized that James was right. The dragons were aliens of a sort. Granted, they'd been created by man many

years in the future, but they did, if one didn't look too closely, come from another planet.

"All right, James, I'll play along. You know Sir Robert better than I do," he said softly.

Now he stood with Angus and James on the front steps of Mills Manor, waiting for the Land Rover with Sir Robert to show up.

James smiled when he saw his car come around the bend and he walked out to greet his guest. He had only met the man a few times, but he knew of his reputation and respected what Sir Robert had managed to accomplish with his life.

When the car stopped, he stepped forward and opened the door for his guest. "Sir Robert, welcome to my home."

Remus stood back and watched the old man carefully. He had never met a scientist before and wasn't sure what to expect. The man was old, even for a muggle, slightly hunched over and he used a cane to help get around.

"Thank you, Lord Mills, although I must admit that I am confused by your invitation."

James nodded. "I can understand that, but I'm in need of your help, Sir Robert. I find myself in uncharted waters and desperately need an expert such as yourself to help guide me. But before we go inside, I would ask that you take a short walk with me. I have several individuals that I would like to introduce you to."

Sir Robert looked at him quizzically then he gestured for Lord Mills to lead the way. James gave a slight bow and they walked around the manor house to the back field. James had sent the entire house staff and groundskeepers away for the day so that this could be done near the house. He knew May was watching from nearby, but she would be discreet and he wasn't worried about the girl who had quickly developed an intense love of all things dragon.

Out in the back there were a series of chairs and a small table with cups and a large thermos of hot tea. James poured several cups and passed them around, then motioned to Sir Robert to sit. "Sir Robert, before we begin, I'd like to introduce you to Angus McNulty,

my game keeper, and Remus Lupin, ah... a friend who helped bring this problem to light. Remus, if you would?"

Remus nodded and put his cup on the table. "Sir Robert, I know your PM and the previous PM knew of my world. What I am wondering is if you are aware of the magical world?"

Sir Robert frowned. "Sir, I'm not at liberty to discuss..."

He trailed off when Remus produced his wand and with a single flick transfigured his Styrofoam cup into a beaten bronze goblet.

Sir Robert's eyes bulged as he examined the goblet in his hand. It was rapidly heating up as the hot tea warmed the metal.

"So, the government does know about the magical world," exclaimed Lord Mills. "You were right, Remus. This will be easier than we thought."

Sir Robert turned his attention to James. "Lord Mills, this information is classified as a state secret! Just talking about it to others is an offense..."

"Yes, yes, I know. But you see, Sir Robert, Remus came to us with a problem that's within the magical world and is perhaps a crime greater than the Nazi atrocities of World War II."

Sir Robert looked shocked and he turned back to Remus with an arched eyebrow. "Well?"

"I don't know how much your government knows about our world, but there are a number of non-human sentient species in the magical world. Recently, another one was awoken to sentience and they find themselves in the position of being little more than livestock in my world. This race has been sentient for untold centuries, but until recently, the memory of who and what they were was hidden, even from themselves. Now they are beginning to fight back against those who believe they are mindless beasts, useful only for the products of their bodies."

"We're here today because we need help, Sir Robert," Remus said with quiet dignity. "The wizarding world stands on the brink of a war"

it cannot win, against a race with abilities they do not understand. And if we aren't very careful, this war could spill into your world."

James leaned forward in his chair. "Sir Robert, we need your help. Think of this as a first contact situation, only the aliens have been here all along, living beside us, hidden."

Sir Robert swallowed nervously and nodded. "Yes, no... first contact is still different. Parts of this apply to first contact, but if I understand rightly, there is no chance of catching any strange diseases or introducing alien life forms to our ecosystem. Still, another intelligence? This is tremendous."

Remus, out of his element, glanced at James, his confusion clear.

"Yes, that is true, Sir Robert," James said. "They have been here long before we even discovered fire."

Sir Robert looked around at the empty field. "I take it that I'm here to meet this race of beings?"

"That was our intent, Sir Robert, but since the few people that have met them were usually initially scared witless, we wanted to tell you about them first," Lord Mills answered for Remus.

Sir Robert nodded. It was a smart precaution on their part. He motioned for Lord Mills to continue, then leaned back and listened to the man speak for nearly an hour.

As he talked, Remus passed several Polaroid photographs over to Sir Robert. The scientist stared at the first one he received for a long time before motioning for them to continue. By the time Lord Mills had finished his explanation, he was anxious to meet a race that had been created by man in the future and then spent thousands of years on this planet, evolving from the original design. Genetically modified creatures was something science was just beginning to explore, and here was a race, created by man! It boggled the mind.

Sir Robert looked anxiously at Remus, who smiled at the man's eagerness. With a flick of his wand, he sent off a message patronus to Harry, who was a few miles away.

Less than a minute later, Sir Robert flinched back from the blast of icy air and then gaped as four dragons wheeled about in the air overhead. A single gesture from Harry had all four landing in a manner that reminded Sir Robert of a precision RAF flight demonstration.

Harry, on Chekiath, had the roughest landing. He barely managed to avoid bouncing off of his dragon's back. The pair had just started flying together and Momnarth had not allowed Chekiath to take Harry between from Disko Island Weyr, although she insisted Chekiath get the jump destination from him. The pair were still learning to fly and it would be another two weeks before Momnarth would allow them to risk any long jumps between. She had them flying straight drills and short jumps from one side of the Weyr bowl to the other.

For this trip to Arran, Momnarth flew Harry, with Chekiath flying as a riderless wingman. Spath and Selanth with Hagrid rounded out the flight.

Harry slid down from Chekiath's back and grinned a quick apology for not being a good rider to his dragon, then he turned to face the others. Hagrid stood off to one side, looking very uncomfortable at being there. Remus wanted to project an image and having Hagrid here helped do just that.

Harry stepped forward and Sir Robert eyed him carefully. Harry had created a look for the riders that was very reminiscent of a World War II aviator. He wore a fur lined flight jacket, insulated one piece flight suit, heavy fur lined gloves and goggles. Harry had Dobby locate the items and he had paid for them in the usual manner, meaning they just took them and left the money behind for someone to find. Even Hagrid found the outfit warm and comfortable for the flight between. Of course, that was after Sirius taught Harry how to enlarge the clothing for the man.

"Harry, this is Sir Robert March, chief scientific advisor to her Majesty's government. Sir Robert, allow me to introduce to the lad who brought this whole situation to light, and the first dragon rider in thousands of years. This is Harry James Potter, Weyrleader for the dragons of Earth," Lord Mills said softly.

Harry stepped forward and offered his hand. Sir Robert took it and tried to meet his eyes, but his gaze kept being drawn from Harry to the dragons over his shoulder. "They're real. They're actually real!" he muttered.

Harry smiled. He had introduced dragons to people several times now and it was always the same. The initial fear, followed by fascination. "Sir Robert, let me introduce you to Chekiath, my dragon."

He tried to hide his smile as Chekiath strutted forward. Harry had coached his dragon so that Chekiath would refrain from using the fanciful names so many dragons used. It hadn't been easy, but Harry didn't want to get off on the wrong foot by having Chekiath calling the old guy Three Leg, or something similar.

"Greetings, sir," Chekiath said politely.

Harry released a relieved breath. Maybe this would work out after all!

Sir Robert's jaw dropped and he stared at the dragon. "Did I really hear you in my head?"

"Yes, sir. I really couldn't talk to you outside of your head. I'm afraid my mouth isn't shaped right for your type of talking," Chekiath replied with a bit of a smug attitude.

Harry groaned and wiped at his face with a hand. All that work and his dragon was going to pull the "I'm the Weyrleader's dragon" routine!

"Sir Robert, I apologize," Harry started to say.

He paused when the old man began to laugh. It was a surprisingly deep, rich sound.

"No apologies needed, lad! Your big fellow here is quite right, after all. His jaw isn't shaped for human speech," the old man said, then he slowly sank back into the chair and shook his head in amazement. "To think his kind was created by man to be intelligent?"

"Well, yes," Harry said a bit uneasily. He didn't want the old man to dwell too much on the issue of their creation, as that could still imply some degree of ownership. "But sir, the dragons have been on this planet for so long that they barely resemble the original design."

Sir Robert looked at Harry speculatively. "Can you explain that?"

Harry nodded and turned to Spath. "Would you share the memory of Sidraneth coming to Earth, please, Spath? Especially what she saw when she first appeared in our skies?"

There was a few moments of silence and most watched Sir Robert intently while Spath replayed memories they had already experienced.

Sir Robert closed his eyes and for a moment Harry was afraid he had fallen asleep. "Mammoths," he muttered. "Late Pleistocene Epoch. That could have been anywhere from 125,000 to 11,000 years ago!"

"Yes, sir," Harry replied softly, "I know. You'll also note that the original dragons in that Weyr only look a little like modern dragons. Of the four dragons here, you see two of the sub breeds - the Hungarian Horntail and the Norwegian Ridgeback. There are eight more breeds of dragons, plus underground versions of some of them, as well."

"You're driving to a point, lad. What are you getting to?" Sir Robert asked sharply.

"My point, sir, is that these dragons might have been created by man, but they have developed into a race unique in every way, just like we humans. They want to renew the old ties they had with humanity, but as a partner species with all the same rights and privileges you'd accord another human being. They are not property. I call Chekiath my dragon, but he also rightly calls me his rider. We are a bonded pair that no power, save death, can separate."

Harry reached out and Chekiath stretched his neck so he could scratch along the ridges. "They think and feel, they reason, they know of themselves and of others. They love in their own unique way. They even have a sense of humor. They are not livestock."

They are not sheep bred to give wool and mutton. They may look nothing like us, sir, but they are a type of people."

Sir Robert held up a hand. "Relax, lad, you sold me when Spath shared his memories. I will admit that I am curious and would love to see some research done here. I mean, if the dragons were created from an indigenous species from this Pern, then it's likely that their DNA could be radically different from ours."

"I think we can arrange for that later, Sir Robert. Right now, we have more pressing matters. The dragons have a place on Disko Island, in Greenland, but they have no way of supporting a herd of livestock to feed themselves. And we still have to deal with the problem of the magical world treating these people as if they were livestock," James Mills said.

Sir Robert blinked a moment, then he nodded. "Yes, yes, priorities first. How about we retire inside, where I can make a few phone calls and hopefully get the ball rolling?"

Sir Robert turned to Harry with a smile. "Lad, I want to thank you. I'm a crusty old fool who believes, perhaps too much, in the power of science. But you've brought dragons into my life – a bit of the fairytale to mix with stodgy old science. And being able to work with a new, intelligent species? For many like me, this will be a dream come true."

Remus smiled and turned to Harry. "Stay and work with Chekiath on your landings. That one looked a little rough. I'll work with Sir Robert and Lord Mills."

Harry smiled at his friend. "All right, Remus. I don't need to be told twice to go flying."

Remus laughed and waved him away, then he turned to catch up to the others, who were heading indoors.

Harry walked over to Chekiath and carefully inspected him. "Hold still, Cheki. I want to make sure that the long jump between here and Disko didn't crack any scales."

"My scales are fine, Harry," the dragon replied with fondness.

"You take very good care of him," said a voice from behind him.

Harry turned and smiled at May. She had left the manor when she saw the adults coming back inside. "I try, but I'm sure it's not good enough," he replied, then he calmly pat his dragon's flank.

"Remus told me about your impression," she said softly. "I'm not trying to hurt you or pry, but was he right? You were going to let Momnarth eat you?"

Harry leaned against Chekiath and closed his eyes. "That seems like a million years ago now," he murmured. Chekiath craned his head back around and crooned softly, his own eyes twirling yellow with stress.

Harry reached out and scratched along Chekiath's eye ridges. May wasn't sure if the action was to comfort his dragon or himself.

"You need to understand. I was forced into a competition that was designed for much older students. My friends thought that I had cheated to enter the contest and refused to believe me when I said that I didn't. I was told that if I didn't compete I would lose my magic. If that happened I'd be cast from my world, back into yours and I'd have no protection from my relatives."

He scratched a little harder and Chekiath pushed against his hand. "I walked out into that arena hoping that I would be reunited with my parents. Hoping that I'd finally meet someone who loved me."

He paused and smiled weakly at May, who was staring at him in horror. She wanted to know but hadn't expected it to be true, or so graphic.

"I was willing to give it all up. But then Chekiath broke shell. He took a few steps, then fell and hit his chin on the ground. I stepped forward and lifted his head and looked into his eyes."

His smile was as bright as a new dawn and he looked away, remembering. "I looked into his eyes and knew right there that I had someone that loved me. Me! In an instant, all those negative feelings fled and I knew what it was like to be loved for the first time in my life. In a way, I was right. I walked into the arena to meet someone that would love me and I found him."

He looked at May once more. She had moved to the other side of Chekiath. "It's nearly impossible to describe. Maybe I'm the wrong person to do so. I don't have the words or the experience to rely on. My relatives weren't the nicest of people."

He fell silent for a moment. "Impressing Chekiath was the greatest moment of my life," he whispered.

"Mine too, Harry," replied Chekiath.

He glanced at his dragon and smiled.

"I'm glad it happened," May declared.

Harry turned to her quizzically.

"You awoke the dragons, Harry. You brought them back and brought them into our lives. I never would have gotten a chance to meet you if you hadn't impressed and I think that is the most important thing to me."

Harry blushed and looked at his feet.

"I like her. You like her too, Harry. You can mate with her if you want," Chekiath said. "We understand that, even with the bond between rider and dragon, riders will still need a human mate."

Harry's face flushed bright red, then all the blood drained from his face. He looked up to see May turning an interesting shade of red also. "Please tell me you didn't hear that!" he exclaimed.

May nodded and looked away, refusing to meet his gaze.

"I'm sorry," he blurted. "I didn't tell him to say that." He spun away to face his dragon. "Chekiath, you can't just go around blurting out stuff like that. But if you must do so, keep it private," he pleaded.

Chekiath crooned his apology, not really understanding what he'd done wrong, and Harry leaned his forehead against his friend's neck. "May, I'm so sorry. I didn't mean to embarrass you."

She chuckled weakly. "I don't have as much exposure to dragons as you do, but I have noticed that they do have a tendency for blunt candidness."

Harry nodded, reluctant to say anything more. His dragon had thoroughly mortified him.

"I guess we're all just learning," Harry finally admitted. He pushed away from his dragon, but refused to meet her gaze. He found her very attractive, but he really didn't need Chekiath announcing it to the world.

May stepped up to the other side of his dragon and caressed his flank. "I can't wait until I can fly on a dragon," she whispered quietly to herself.

Harry looked up and smiled. "Soon I'll be able to give you a ride on Chekiath. We're not quite ready for passengers, but I promise you'll get your ride."

May smiled at him and he fought another blush before turning back to his inspection of Chekiath's scales.

He's not like any boy I know, May mused. He's obviously attracted to me but he refuses to do anything about it. I wonder why?

Without a doubt one of the most intriguing and unusual features of the dragons is their ability to retain and pass on complex memories spanning thousands of generations. While it might not be fair to say that everything a dragon has experienced is shared, research suggests that a line of dragons sharing the same genetic ancestors will share the same memories. It is for this reason that all dragons on Earth remember Sidraneth, or as they prefer to call her, the Mother of All Dragons.

Excerpted from *The Weyrs of Earth* by Remus John Lupin, published 2040.

Author's Notes:

To the fellow in the badlands, keep your head down and we're glad we can give you some escape from your reality. And thanks for your efforts.

To the guy with the severe skin condition, seek out a dermatologist. Telling us about your problems gets you no where.

MrBlack, have a box of tissues, on us.

No, Firestone is no longer needed and honestly I'm not sure its even available on Earth. The dragon's ability to produce fire seems... almost magical. Imagine that.

For all those clamoring for a queen or queen rider etc. Slow down. Right now we've barely scratched the surface and things are just starting to happen. There's an awful lot that needs to happen before we get anywhere near that point.

Ron will remain true to canon at this point in his life. Unfortunately that means that he, and many many others from Hogwarts will drop out of sight simply because they aren't important to the story. Hell, Voldemort isn't important either and will be dealt with shortly.

Harry is changing as we speak. He's bonded and the bond alters his personality, just like it will alter the personalities of others. So expect these characters to act OOC.

Standard Disclaimer:

The audience filled the theater, sitting down and waiting patiently for the story to begin. A strange silence descended upon the audience as they waited. Every so often a screaming was heard from behind the darkened curtain.

Some poor soul was being tortured, but no one knew who, or why. Although, with Bob and Alyx, reasons for such things were usually trivial in the extreme.

Suddenly the doors at the back of the theater opened and a half dressed Bob and Alyx rushed into the theater, spouting apologies while they ran down to the stage.

"I told you we were going to be late!" Alyx snarled.

"Yeah, but you wanted to see how that new negligee went with your chain saw!" Bob replied, as he tried to put on his shoe and run at the same time.

"You could have told me the time!"

A scream came from behind the curtain and Alyx skidded to a halt. Bob plowed into her back and both crashed to the floor.

"Someone's torturing someone behind our curtain!" she hissed.

Bob blinked and his eyes narrowed. "They can't get away with that! Torture is our schtick! Next thing you know they'll be giving our disclaimers and telling people we don't own Harry Potter or the Dragon of Pern!"

Alyx nodded and reached into her bra and pulled out a cold steam powered nuclear shotgun.

Bob blinked and wondered if that was where he lost that other slipper. It seemed to have room for everything in there!

"You pull the curtain back and I'll fire off several hundred rounds. That'll scare them," Alyx whispered.

"What about them?" Bob asked, pointing to the audience.

"Start the story, they won't notice a thing then."

"Enjoy the chapter folks, Alyx and I have some cleaning to do," Bob said, then he pulled the curtain aside.

There are 10 known species of dragons. Of all the known species, the Horntail is the largest and most violent. The Peruvian Vipertooth is the smallest and most docile of the dragons. For a brief period of time, wizards in Venice attempted to domesticate the Vipertooth but ultimately gave up on the endeavor. Research continues at most reserves on ways to make the beasts less dangerous.

Excerpt from *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find them* by Newt Scamander.

Disko Island Weyr Council Meeting, December 17th...

Harry sat on the small camp chair that Dobby had found somewhere. Around him were Sirius and Remus. Hagrid was nearby nursing a sick dragon who's scales had cracked, causing a severe infection. Dobby sat slightly behind Harry, having just lit the bonfire.

It had become a tradition for them. Each night they would gather around the fire and discuss the events of the day and make plans for the future.

Harry pulled out a sheet of parchment and looked it over. "Sirius, what are you doing with that thing you found at the house? Are you done with it yet?"

Sirius grinned. "It took a bit of doing, but I found the right spells in my family library. Tomorrow morning I'm going to have Dobby dispose of it for me. In the meantime, it's in a cage at Grimmauld Place."

Sirius hadn't explained exactly what had been discovered, just that they found a very dangerous object and he was disposing of it. He also didn't tell Harry that after he had used the spells he had located in his family library, he had Remus obliviate him. He didn't want to remember using such dark magic, ever.

Harry nodded. He wasn't sure what they found, but he trusted them to take care of it.

"Remus?"

Remus smiled. "After we managed to get the senior undersecretary to wake up from his fainting spell he promised he'd do his best to arrange a meeting with the Prime Minister. In the meantime, Sir Robert has located an old RAF base that's not currently in use, though it is still owned by the government. He's going to press for us to be granted use of the base as a Weyr in country. The base is old and over grown with weeds, but we would have room for all of the dragons and plenty of space for a food herd to graze."

Harry checked off a line on his parchment, then he looked up. "I have a new topic to discuss. It's something we still have some time on, but it's going to be a pressing issue in another month or two."

"What's that, Harry?" Remus asked.

"Right around the beginning of January we'll come into one of the two hatching seasons for dragons. Dragons mate year round, just as people do, but there are only two times each year when eggs are possible from those matings. Spath thinks that we're going to have a very small batch of eggs for this weyr because the females understand that we'll only have a handful of rider candidates to offer. As to the other Weyrs?" He shrugged. "Best guess is it'll be business as usual. It's going to take years to ramp up the people we need to provide riders world wide, but we have to start somewhere."

Both men were silent for a moment, then Sirius asked, "What are the requirements we're looking for? I know that May girl could be a rider, but what do we need?"

"That is easy, Smelly Dog," replied Spath. "An ideal rider should be between 13 and 20 turns old, and be sensitive. We can tell who might make a good rider, but only the hatchlings will know for certain."

Harry nodded. "Spath tells me that there were a number of sensitives at Hogwarts and May's school had several more. My problem is figuring out how to convince these people to offer themselves at a hatching."

"Informing a bunch of muggles about dragons each time there is a hatching is going to get tedious," Remus murmured. "Do we have any idea how many candidates we need for this hatching?"

"Double the number of eggs," Momnarth replied. "We understand the difficulties involved, so we are planning on keeping the numbers of eggs low until we have enough people. We have always controlled the number of eggs, since the wizards were killing our kind. When I lay, I can lay nearly 100 eggs if I wanted to, but I didn't want to bring so many dragons into a world that would kill them. Soon the Weyrs will begin to produce their own riders. We can be patient until that happens."

"I think the best idea would be to ask each clan of dragons to send one female to donate an egg if possible," Harry offered. "It would really limit this weyr, but that way dragons world wide would feel like they are helping rebuild."

"That is a good idea, Weyrleader," Spath replied after a moment of silence. "But the issue of riders still remains."

"I'll talk to James and Sir Robert about this. Sir Robert mentioned the idea of using military forces to protect the dragons. Perhaps they can also help come up with candidates to offer the hatchlings," Remus offered.

Harry made another note on his parchment and nodded. "I'll send a note to Dumbledore asking what he thinks about some candidates from his school."

He looked up from his parchment and noted Hagrid approaching. He waved the large man to a tree stump he had fashioned into a comfortable seat for him. "How's Tecanth?"

Hagrid frowned. "He's not good, Harry. Remus supplied me with a muggle remedy, which I'm tryin'. I've given him somethin' fer the pain an' put a poultice on the wound to draw it out."

Harry shot a look at Remus.

The older man grinned. "Sir Robert contacted a friend at the Royal College of Veterinary Medicine and they recommended something

called a broad spectrum anti-biotic. I gave Hagrid the medicine earlier today."

Harry nodded and turned back to Hagrid. "Muggle medicine works slower than ours does Hagrid, but with luck, Tecanth will show an improvement soon."

"Aye, we kin hope," rumbled Hagrid. "As Weyrleader, I think yeh need to order the dragons to stick to straight flyin' if they have any scale problems, Harry. Flying Between seems to make things worse. I also think we need to make it a priority tha' any dragon with cracked scales see me. Most don' come lookin' fer me until they're already in trouble."

Harry nodded and turned to Spath. "Spath?"

"It will be as you order, Weyrleader," replied the ancient dragon. "If a dragon is too ill for Between, the Weyrhealer can travel to the dragon."

Hagrid looked up at Spath and grinned. He loved flying on his Selanth.

Harry smiled. "Thank you, Spath. I understand this is all new, but we'll get it all straightened out. Hagrid, Remus says the muggles may have a place we can move into. When we move, I'd like you to find a building we can use to treat the dragons. We'll see about setting you up with a proper infirmary for them."

Hagrid smiled broadly. For years he'd loved working with dangerous creatures, but what he had with Selanth went far beyond that. It was unlike anything he had ever experienced before. Now he had an entire race of dragons looking to him to help them and he was loving every minute of it.

Harry stood and stretched. "Well, I'm knackered. I'm going to turn in."

He waved to the chorus of "Good nights" from his friends.

"He's pushing himself really hard," Remus commented sadly. "He's growing up too fast."

"He's got a lot on his shoulders," Sirius added. "But he takes time out for fun stuff. He loves flying still, and I've seen him laughing with that pretty blond from Arran."

Remus chuckled. "I think May enjoys the fact that Harry gets all tongue tied around her. According to James, she had a few guys that were really pushy with her, which made her rather timid. Meeting the dragons and Harry is helping her get over that."

Both men fell silent and eyed the entrance to Harry's Weyr. They slept in comfort in a wizarding tent, but Harry kept to the cave since no tent could fit him and his dragon.

Office of the Director, London Zoological Society, December 18th...

The director circled the cage warily. It was covered with a small tarp and a low growling came from under it.

He carefully removed the letter that sat on top of the cage. Examining it closely, he discovered it wasn't paper.

He didn't understand how this had been delivered to his locked office but he didn't want to take any chances either. Walking over to his desk, he picked up the phone and buzzed his secretary.

"Mary, call down to the clinic and ask for Doctor Rawlings to come up with a full kit for a possible rabid animal. Better tell her to bring a few assistants along, just in case."

"Yes, sir,"

"Tell them to hurry, Mary," the director said, then he placed the receiver back on the hook. Feeling a little safer with the desk between him and the cage, he unfolded the parchment.

Sirs,

I am at a loss and I thought you would be the people to turn this over to. I found this thing crawling in my yard and it scared me silly. My wife thinks it's the work of the devil, but I know it has to be some kind of animal. In any event, I'm just glad it's gone from my property.

Relieved

He frowned. It wasn't the first time someone had turned to the Zoo for help identifying a wild animal and in a few cases they even got involved in rescuing animals. But mostly there were smaller animal rescue organizations for that. A knock at the door interrupted his musings.

"Yes?"

"Sir, Doctor Rawlings is here with two of her people," Mary said from the doorway. Then growling came from the cage on the floor and her eyes widened. Fearful, she took a step backwards.

"It's safe, I think, Mary, but please send Katy in," replied the director.

Katy Rawlings entered the office and her eye immediately went to the cage. The director stood, walked over to her and handed her the strange note. "I have no idea how this got into my office during the night. I can assure you it was quite locked up."

"From the sounds, I'd say it's a weasel of some type, perhaps a badger or wolverine. But you were right to call, sir," she replied, then she turned to her assistants. "Glove up, boys, and let's get an idea what we're dealing with."

Once they were gloved, she turned back to the director, who was also a respected wildlife biologist, although he hadn't indulged in any field work in nearly 20 years. "Sir, if you must stay in the room, I'm going to insist you stay behind your desk."

The director nodded and looked at the cage on the floor with a bit of trepidation. Katy turned to one of her people who was carrying a noose stick and nodded for him to use the stick to lift the canvas covering the cage.

He edged the long stick under one side of the canvas and lifted it gently off of the cage. Everyone in the room stepped back and gasped.

What they saw was a result of several days of intense studying on the part of Sirius Black and the infamous Black Family library. The homunculus that housed Voldemort's spirit had been charmed and spelled heavily. For one thing, the only noises it could make were

growls and barks. What little magic the spirit had available was channeled entirely into keeping the artificial body alive, and the spirit had been further cursed. Should the spirit flee the body, it would be banished.

Sirius made Voldemort understand what he was doing. He couldn't force the spirit into the next great adventure, but he could banish the spirit from this realm of existence. Voldemort understood exactly what Sirius had done. He had been cursed in a truly terrible manner. Should he flee this body, he would be transported immediately to a realm of demons. Demons that would delight in seeing that his immortal soul would be tormented forever.

"What is it?" whispered Katy Rawlings.

The darkest Dark Lord known to the wizarding world looked up at the people and growled ominously. It moved feebly around in the cage. The biologists were surprised by the fur and the scales. It almost looked like someone had somehow managed to cross an orangutang and a snake and perhaps a rat together.

"I don't know. I've never seen anything like it." replied the director. "I can't recall ever being repulsed by an animal before now, but this is truly ugly."

Those in the room fell silent as they stared at the beast before them.

The director shook himself out of his shocked surprise. "Look, get it down to one of the quarantined cages. I'll put in a call to our friends at the British Museum. They might be able to come up an idea of what it is."

Katy motioned to her assistants, who shared a glance, then carefully threaded the noose stick through the handle on top of the cage. There was no way they were getting within range of that thing. Between them, they lifted the cage and left the room, hustling it down to the clinic and a quarantine room. Everyone would feel safer once it was locked away.

"I'll draw some blood. DNA may give us an idea of what we're dealing with," Katy announced.

"Right. I'll call CID and turn the note over to them. Perhaps they can figure out who dumped it in our laps," declared the director.

Thanks to Sirius Black, Voldemort had become a scientific experiment. A curiosity that would puzzle scientists for decades to come.

And with that, an orb in the Hall of Prophecies faded to black. The Dark Lord had been vanquished by a power he knew not – dragons awakened by Harry Potter.

Hagrid's Hut, Hogwarts, December 24th...

Albus Dumbledore checked his watch again and pulled his cloak around him. It was cold and snow was beginning to fall. Tomorrow would be the Ball for the Tournament and this was going to be his last bit of free time for a few days.

Hedwig had arrived with a message asking if it would be possible to meet with Harry and a few dragons discreetly. He had eagerly replied with a time and a place, and a request to include one additional person.

"Relax, my dear. I'm sure Harry is just fine," he said softly to his companion.

She turned and was about to speak when a blast of cold air hit them both. Overhead, four dragons appeared, Harry on Chekiath, Momnarth, Spath and Selanth. Harry had actually switched from flying Momnarth to Chekiath a few miles away. At Momnarth's insistence, they still weren't allowed to make jumps Between of more than a few miles.

The dragons landed and Dumbledore's companion sucked in a breath and took a step backwards. Albus reached up and touched her shoulder. She looked at him fearfully and he shook his head, giving her a gentle smile. "It's perfectly safe," he said.

She relaxed and turned to watch Harry dismount from his dragon. At twenty two feet in length, he was still the smallest dragon among the four, but everyone was convinced that he was going to be a very large dragon when he reached maturity. In fact, his growth rate was surprising the dragons, who had never seen anything like it before.

Harry removed his goggles and smiled at Dumbledore and his companion. "Headmaster, Professor," he said in greeting.

Minerva couldn't hold back any further, she stepped forward and gave Harry a quick hug, which surprised him greatly.

"She smells like cat," exclaimed Chekiath. "Cats are too small. You need to eat a lot of them to fill you up."

Harry groaned and closed his eyes. "Cheki, please. Professor McGonagall is like Sirius, an animagus who can change into a cat. What did I say about that?"

"We don't eat friends," Chekiath admitted reluctantly.

Harry smiled at McGonagall in apology. "I'm sorry, Professor, but Chekiath is sometimes a little too blunt."

"I'm sorry, Harry. I'll try better," Chekiath said, then he turned his large head towards Minerva. "I apologize, Professor Tabbycat, I would never dream of eating you. I am still learning what it means to be the dragon of the Weyrleader. Its hard!"

Minerva put a hand to her breast and looked stunned by the conversation. "Goodness gracious!" she exclaimed, "If I didn't experience it for myself." She stopped and looked carefully at Harry's dragon. "I am pleased to meet you... Chekiath?"

Harry smiled and nodded. "Yes, he's Chekiath, or as I prefer to call him, the bottomless pit. He eats more than Ron Weasley does."

"I am a growing dragon," Chekiath replied smugly. "I need to be big for my rider."

Dumbledore stepped up to stand next to McGonagall. "You're looking well, Harry, and so are you Hagrid," he said, then he eyed Harry's dragon. "I am astounded by his growth rate. Most dragons in the reserves never grow this fast."

Harry nodded, then he pulled out his wand and conjured some chairs for everyone. "The dragons are changing, becoming more like

they once were, Headmaster. Please sit and we can talk about what brought me here."

"I'm glad to see your keeping up on your studies, Mr. Potter. That was some impressive conjuring," Minerva said.

Harry smiled at the compliment. "We have so few things in the Weyr right now that conjuring became a necessary skill, Professor."

"Weyr? I don't know the word," Minerva said. Dumbledore was glad she asked it because it was something he'd like to know too.

"A Weyr is where a dragon lives," Chekiath replied for Harry. "We wouldn't live in any other place."

Minerva blinked and peered at Albus. "Have you been giving the dragons lessons in obscurity?"

Harry's laughter stopped the impending discussion between the two professors. "I'm sorry, but dragons have a tendency to catch us by surprise sometimes with their answers. A weyr is where a dragon lives. There can be one dragon or hundreds of dragons. A true Weyr is more than just a place of dragons, though. It's also a place where the riders live. Right now, we have one true Weyr and another place we're working to turn into one. And that actually leads me to part of the reason for my visit."

Albus arched an eyebrow. "Oh?"

"Dragons need riders, sir, and some of your students are capable of being riders," Harry said simply.

"Harry," Dumbledore said slowly, "if I help you with this, the Ministry could arrest me as an accessory to kidnapping. The students you are talking about are not adults."

"I realized that, sir," Harry said carefully. "That's why I asked for us to meet. I also need to tell you that the muggle government has expressed an intense interest in the dragons. I could go to them and they would probably help me fill our needs. But if the wizarding world isn't represented, there could be problems. In fact, I know there will be. The muggle government is not happy with the idea of any kind of

slavery and is very unhappy that the wizarding world thinks it can ignore muggle law."

"What do you mean ignore muggle law, Mr. Potter?" asked Minerva.

Harry ran a hand through his hair and considered his reply for a moment. "Professor, the muggles outlawed slavery in this country in the eighteenth century. There is no death penalty, no indentured servitude and no legal discrimination. I'm hoping that by including wizards among the riders, we can stop this from becoming a war between wizard and muggle. If it comes to that, the muggles will have dragons on their side."

"Surely you wouldn't betray your own people, Harry," exclaimed Minerva.

Harry stood and looked at the Transfiguration Professor. "My people are dragon riders, Professor. They are part of a partnership with another being, which transcends human love and human experience. I am Weyrleader. All of the dragons on the planet look to me for protection and guidance and I will do everything in my power to protect them."

"Stop it, both of you," Albus said a little harshly, then his expression softened. "We have a problem and I'm certain we can solve it without it resulting in war. I recognize the danger we're all facing. Let's try to work together to solve these problems."

Harry scuffed one shoe on the frozen ground and looked ashamed. "Professor McGonagall, I apologize for my harsh words."

"Harsh they may be, but the sentiment is true, Mr. Potter," Minerva said gently. "The dragons have become your family and you have a right to protect your family from any threats."

Embarrassed, Harry sat down again. "The bond of dragon and rider is incredible, Professor and it's not without benefits. I seem to remember more of what I read and Remus tells me that I am immune to legilimency, thanks to my bond," Harry smiled at the two and he leaned back on his chair. "Those are just two of the minor benefits I've experienced."

He paused and looked thoughtful. "Professor, perhaps the best way to approach this is to just ask each student if they would be interested in bonding with a dragon. I think the ones that were touched at the task will jump at the chance. If they're interested, you can let me know and I'll get in contact with them privately. This will reduce your involvement to a minimum."

"That might work, Harry, but I still worry that the Ministry is taking your involvement in the dragon crisis and magnifying it until you are the sole reason for the crisis," Albus replied.

Harry chuckled. "Professor, the dragons were locked in their own minds, unable to communicate with each other or humans until Chekiath and I impressed. The moment I touched Momnarth's mind, it brought all those suppressed racial memories to the forefront. In an instant, our dragons remembered who they were and became a people again. For once the Ministry is right. I am responsible for what happened to the dragons. Well, Chekiath and I," he said, then he gave his dragon a fond glance and Chekiath nudged him with his large head.

"I'm sorry that this is causing problems for people, but it boils down to greed. We have discovered some interesting things about dragons that could keep them as an economic powerhouse, but as an equal partner with wizards. Unfortunately, the wizarding world will not accept the idea that anyone is equal to them."

He turned towards Hagrid, who had been watching the meeting in silence. "Hagrid would you show the professors what you discovered?"

Hagrid nodded and pulled out a flat disk, about six inches across, from one of the many pockets in his great coat. "A yehng dragon sheds his scales as he grows. From birth to roughly eighteen months old, the dragon is constantly sheddin' these scales. One o' the things we learned was tha' the dragons suffer terribly durin' this time, 'cause the wizards don' help 'em. Scales break, tearin' at the underlyin' hide an' causin' painful sores. Those sores get infected. Some o' the dragons die 'cause o' the lack o' care tha' a rider would've given the dragon.

"But most importantly, we discovered these scales can do this," he said, then he lifted the scale. "Lumos."

The scale began to glow brightly, to the astonishment of both professors.

"Heart strings require a dragon be killed. Scales are freely shed by growing dragons and are as magical, if not more, than heartstrings," Harry offered. He nodded to Hagrid, who canceled the spell, then he held out the scale to Albus.

Albus took the scale and looked at it in wonder, then he passed it to Minerva who examined it, shaking her head.

"So you see, Professors? I'll grant that you'll need to find substitutes for potion ingredients, but you hold in your hand a replacement for a heartstring that doesn't mean a dragon has to die," Harry offered. "Keep that scale and run a test or two. Show it to Ollivander if you want. We can always get you more scales."

Minerva looked pointedly at Albus and he nodded at her prodding. "Harry, it pains me to admit it, but we're very worried about your friend Hermione."

Harry looked startled for a moment. "Hermione? What's wrong with her?" he asked guardedly. She had hurt him terribly and he wasn't even sure he classed her as a friend anymore.

Minerva turned to Harry. "She was very upset after the task. She realized that she had contributed to the problems you were experiencing and was wracked with guilt. Her grades suffered and I fear that she has become very disillusioned with our world over this."

He slowly nodded. He was still uncertain what the problem was.

"This year the school is holding a Yule Ball, in celebration of the holiday and for the tournament," Albus added. "Had you stayed, you would have been required to attend the dance. Most of the students stayed over for the holidays because we so rarely have an event like this. Miss Granger opted to return to her parents home for the holiday. Ordinarily, we wouldn't be concerned, but she is well known for being a close friend of yours and, well, frankly, the Ministry hasn't been acting too rationally where you are concerned. We are worried that they might take her and her parents into custody in the mistaken belief that she knows how to contact you."

Minerva leaned forward, catching Harry's gaze. "If she should decide to withdraw from school without taking her OWLs, the Ministry will move to obliviate her and her parents of all knowledge of magic."

"They'd do that?" demanded Harry angrily.

Minerva shrugged. "She is muggle born, Harry. The Ministry only considers her a real witch after she takes her OWLs. Her parents have no real rights in their eyes."

Harry grimaced. Hermione's actions had hurt him a lot, but he didn't want her getting into that kind of trouble.

Minerva offered a slip of parchment to him. "I've taken the liberty of writing down the address of her home."

He sighed and accepted the parchment. "I don't know what to say about her," he admitted. "But if I can help her, I will. I don't know if I'll ever trust her enough to be a friend, but I won't let them take away her memories."

Albus nodded. "That is a relief. But do try to forgive her, Harry. She's young and made a terrible mistake. The weeks since the task have weighed heavily upon her. Even if you don't renew your friendship, don't hold any anger against her. She is truly sorry for what happened to you and what she helped drive you to."

Harry looked at the man who had failed him more times than he had helped, and still felt he was honestly trying to help this time. He nodded again. "I'll set a watch on her house."

Albus nodded and stood. "Will you send me a list of the students you know that the dragons are interested in?"

Harry chuckled, "I will, but I daresay you won't like some of the names on the list."

"Oh?"

"Draco Malfoy, for one, Susan Bones, for another. All in all, the dragons told me about nearly a dozen students," Harry replied.

"Oh, my," exclaimed Minerva. "Malfoy and Bones!"

"Hermione was on that list as well, but some of the dragons are troubled by her selection," Harry added.

"Oh? Why is that?"

Harry shrugged. "She doesn't like to fly. The bond between rider and dragon is very tight. I suppose it's possible that she could transmit her fear to her dragon."

"Part of growing up is learning to conquer one's fears," Albus said softly. "Perhaps this is precisely what Miss Granger needs to do just that."

Harry shrugged, unwilling to say one way or another.

"Mr. Potter, it's not unknown to us that you've had nothing but problems with Mr. Malfoy. Are you sure you want him?" asked Minerva.

Harry smiled a bit crazily and the dragons rumbled in laughter. "Professor, Malfoy and I may loathe each other, but if he impresses a dragon, I'm sure he'll settle down. If nothing else, his dragon will calm him down."

"Of course he will, Harry. You are the Weyrleader," added Chekiath.

Harry shot his dragon an look of gratitude.

Hagrid rumbled with his own laughter. "Professors, Harry is Weyrleader. All o' the dragons look to Harry fer guidance an' follow his word without question. In old times, the position o' Weyrleader changed by who flew the senior queen, but we don' have queens like tha' anymore. Yehng Malfoy may not like Harry, but if he impresses, his dragon will make sure he obeys, whether he likes it or not."

Harry looked embarrassed. "I'm not sure how we'll handle change of leadership, but we'll work something out."

Albus stood. "It's getting late. We best be getting back to the school. Harry, if you need anything, additional food, more beds, or just need an explanation on how a spell works, contact me. While I might wish that you had remained at school, I do understand why you left and I will do what I can to support you."

"Thank you, White Beard," Chekiath said.

Albus blinked and started to laugh. He bowed to Chekiath. "Take good care of your rider," he said.

Chekiath bobbed his head and his eyes twirled with a light green color, echoing his amusement.

Harry pulled his goggles from his pocket and put them on before climbing up the leg Chekiath offered. He sat for a moment, waiting for Hagrid to mount, then he pumped his fist once and all four dragons leapt aloft before going Between.

Hogwarts Great Hall, December 25th...

The Triwizard champions entered the hall to stupendous applause, but it was a sound that was missing any happy quality. Despite the season and the best efforts of some of the faculty, the Tournament ground on like a sputtering engine. The students had lost their enthusiasm for the competition. Even the champions seemed to be less than pleased at being participants.

Of all the people present, one person in particular seemed most unhappy at being there. Ron Weasley sat off in one corner, watching the others. He wore the ugly maroon robes his mum bought and they almost matched the ugly scowl that graced his face.

His friend was gone before he could even attempt to forgive him. And since that day, Hermione had stopped helping him with his homework, which meant his grades were dropping. She had gone home for the holiday, irritating him further. He was going to ask her to the ball if he failed to find a date. Now, without Hermione, he was forced to go alone.

Could this year get any worse? he thought sourly.

A Durmstrang student danced past him, dancing with a Hogwarts girl he didn't recognize. He made a comment in German and she laughed. "He was the guy that turned his back on his best friend," she replied. He grunted and made a face, then steered his partner away from Ron.

Ron's scowl deepened further. He moved closer to the wall and started to edge towards the door. He had a Quidditch magazine he could be reading, rather than putting up with this crap.

Up at the main table, Albus Dumbledore sat with several other professors and he watched his students. Balls were a rarity at Hogwarts and if this one was an example, it would be years before they had another. There was an uneasy undercurrent in the hall and he noted that several Hogwarts couples had started to slip out. They were leaving the ball after only a few dances. If this continued, only Durmstrang and Beauxbatons would remain.

He couldn't really blame them. He didn't feel like there was anything to celebrate either. The only bright spot was that the Prophet's headlines today were about the American's announcing their capture of Peter Pettigrew and his confession concerning the death of the Potters.

Albus figured it was the reason why Cornelius had canceled his plans to attend the ball tonight.

Granger Household in Crawley, December 26th...

"Hermione, sweetheart, I think its time we had a talk," Emma said from the door to her bedroom.

Hermione looked up from where she had been laying on the bed and nodded reluctantly.

"You came home from school and you've been uncharacteristically quiet. Your father and I are worried because you haven't been talking about school work, or even reading during this time. It's clear to us that something has happened and we're concerned."

Hermione sat up on her bed and motioned for her mum to take a seat at her desk, then she pulled up her knees and wrapped her

arms around them. "You remember that I wrote about Harry entering into the tournament?"

Emma nodded slowly. "Yes. You said that he claimed he didn't enter and that you didn't think he would have entered himself into that contest."

Hermione nodded unhappily. "Ron started fighting with Harry, accusing him of not helping him enter also. Harry kept protesting that he didn't enter, but no one believed him. Ron kept at it, sniping and harping on Harry. He got really vicious. I found myself wedged in the middle of a nasty fight that I didn't want any part of."

Emma nodded slowly. "Go on," she said cautiously. She was afraid of where this was going.

"I told Harry that I didn't want to be involved in the fight between him and Ron. He said he understood that and he was sorry that Ron was dragging me into it. I told him that until it was resolved, I was going to spend more time studying than hanging out with either of them. I told Harry that because I knew speaking to Ron would have only caused him to snap at me again for not supporting him. Harry wouldn't argue with me."

Hermione looked up at her mother, her eyes were filled with tears. "I didn't know it at the time but I hurt him terribly that day."

Emma sighed. It wasn't nearly as bad as what her husband had feared. He had been afraid she had been molested by another student. But this, too, was serious. Harry's friendship had been one of the foundations of Hermione's life since she'd started at the school. Every letter, and most of the comments she made to them, referenced Harry in some way.

"Harry became cold and distant the few times I talked to him, and then at the task... that damn task," she said bitterly. "What kind of people are these wizards? They made him face a dragon. A dragon! When I first saw what they were making the students do I realized the mistake I had made. Harry had no one to help him prepare for it because I'd abandoned him."

"What happened?" Emma whispered.

Hermione took a ragged breath. "He had no plan for the dragon. He walked into that arena and thanked everyone for the opportunity to rejoin his parents."

"His parents? I thought they were dead!" exclaimed Emma in alarm.

Hermione nodded. "They are dead. Harry calmly walked out to a creature nearly sixty feet long that's capable of breathing fire hot enough to melt steel. His wand was in his back pocket. There were students cheering him on, hoping to see him die a gory death."

She choked back a sob and continued on as if she had no choice but to relive the event. "We, that is the entire school, had turned against him. No one, not even a teacher, had a kind word for him. Then, rather than helping him, I shut him out. He walked out into that arena and the only thing he had planned was to thank the wizards for giving him a quick death."

"Did he... Is he...?" She couldn't finish her question.

She shook her head. "Something happened. One of the eggs in the nest hatched and something happened with Harry and the baby dragon. Then the air around the stands were full of dragons, hundreds of them. When they left, they took Harry with him."

Hermione looked at her mum with anguish in her eyes. "Mum, I helped him do that. I helped him walk into that arena with no plan other than suicide. He was my best friend and I cut him off when he needed me the most!

"Just before the dragons left, several swooped down to the stands. One looked at me clearly, almost as if it knew what I had done, and I felt so ashamed. Even the dragons knew I abandoned my friend. I knew he was in trouble and I did nothing!"

Emma jumped from her chair and rushed to the bed where she wrapped her daughter in her embrace, just holding her while she wept. This wasn't the end of it by any means. Now that she understood what had happened, she was relieved in one way and very alarmed in another. She had shared her husband's fears, but those fears had been replaced by entirely different ones. She didn't want her daughter around people who thought nothing of forcing a fourteen year old to face a monster.

Once her daughter had calmed down, Emma spoke again. "Hermione, we're going to talk about this more when your father gets home. I'm not sure I want you going to a school that sees nothing wrong with making a child face a monster capable of killing him. And while your school might be a great place to learn magic, I think you'd have trouble balancing a checkbook. We know that magic is important to you, and we agree, but you're missing some very vital skills that can only be taught in a non-magical environment, and that concerns us."

Hermione slowly nodded in agreement. She wasn't sure she wanted to remain at Hogwarts. Since the task, the magical world had lost much of its appeal. She wasn't sure if it was because Harry was gone or because of what she had done, but the luster was gone.

"Have you tried sending Harry a letter? He is still alive, isn't he?" asked Emma.

"Professor McGonagall says he's alive and fine. And no, I haven't. What can I say? 'Dear Harry, I'm sorry I helped you think suicide was a good idea?'"

Emma frowned. "Well, I wouldn't put it that way, but an apology might help matters."

"I'll think about it, Mum," Hermione replied after a moment's thought. She had written hundreds of apologies in her mind and hadn't been able to put a single one to parchment.

Up on the roof of the house, Sirius Black sat with Norendrath, who had been busy passing the conversation to Sirius. Around them on the other houses were four other dragons, all standing guard and listening in, just in case the family in that house ran into trouble.

"Looks like the Professors were right," he commented quietly. "Her parents might not let her return to school."

Norendrath nodded in agreement and went back to listening.

Campbeltown Weyr, formerly MoD Machrihanish, Scottish West Coast, December 26th...

The base was owned and maintained by the Ministry of Defense, but it was in what they called maintenance mode, meaning it wasn't being actively used, but it was being kept in working order. The MoD had handed over part of the facility to Sir Robert and Lord Mills as official liaisons to the Dragons of Earth.

The government felt uncomfortable dealing with Harry due to his age, but they also recognized the position he held among the dragons. Their response was a simple one, let Sir Robert and Lord Mills handle the interface between the dragons and the government.

The base itself was perfect for their needs. The hangars were easily sectioned off into comfortable stalls for each unbound dragon. There were numerous large hangars that had been designed to house long range bombers, so they were quite large. In addition to the hangars, there were a number of auxiliary buildings that could be used for dormitories, storage and administrative functions.

Bonded dragons would receive different quarters more suitable to human/dragon habitats.

For Sir Robert, the first shock came when the dragons moved into the hangars and started building their sleeping areas. The hangars were sectioned into stalls, one per dragon, and each dragon filled their stall with stones. The stones were trucked in from a nearby gravel quarry, then the wizards moved the stones for the dragons. The dragons would then breath fire over those stones until they glowed a deep red. Finally, Dobby would dump sand that had also been trucked in for the Weyr. Each dragon spent several hours pushing the sand around until they were happy with it, then each settled down with a satisfied sigh.

What had Sir Robert so excited was the fact that the dragon fire heated the stones. According to the dragons, they'd continue to glow and give off radiant heat forever!

He didn't believe the claim but he was deep into plans for a number of experiments, which Harry was allowing in the spirit of cooperation. Harry was desperate to find ways to make the dragons useful to the muggles. He didn't understand why Sir Robert was interested in glowing rocks, but it did seem important to the little old man.

With the help of Lord Mills, Harry spent nearly all of his remaining cash buying enough livestock and supplies to feed the dragons. He still had access to Gringotts, even if they weren't too happy with him at the moment.

The dragons thought the new Weyr was all right, but it wasn't as nice as Disko Island, with its wonderful bowl, caves and steaming hot springs. But they'd make do. The dragons understood Disko was too isolated and remote to be an active Weyr.

Disko wasn't being abandoned, but until official arrangements could be made to cede the island to the dragons, they had moved here. Harry intended to turn Disko into the hatching Weyr, where all attempts to impress would happen. That way, any gravid female from any Weyr could take advantage of it.

Harry looked around his room with satisfaction. He had a normal looking bedroom except for one missing wall that had been removed to give him access to the area where Chekiath slept. A large metal sliding door leading outside had been installed. Chekiath could raise or lower the door on his own by pressing on the appropriate mat on the floor.

Hagrid and Harry were the only two people to have such rooms so far, but work was continuing on converting living space for more dragon riders.

The government was uncomfortable with the idea of using children to bond with dragons but no one had a real solution for the problem. The dragons insisted that any candidates must be between the ages of thirteen and twenty years.

The government had planned to offer the dragons young military recruits until Harry pointed out that no matter what their allegiance might be, it would switch if they bonded to a dragon. Harry still wanted to try some of the recruits but he felt it necessary to stress to the government that the best way to deal with the dragons would be to do so openly and honestly.

He didn't bother telling them that the dragons would warn him about any humans who couldn't be trusted. Lord Mills was dealing with the issue of trying to find willing participants among military service families that could be offered as potential riders. It was felt that

among the military families they would, at least, understand the need for secrecy.

The selection process was frustratingly slow because it was impossible to identify what made for a potential dragon rider and what didn't. So far they had found May McNulty and five other teens from the local area around Lord Mills' estate, but the government had been reluctant to contact them. They weren't very happy when Harry insisted that May be included, or that he would be bringing in some wizards, as well.

The bulk of the rider candidates would be muggle, but Harry had managed to include wizards in the mix. It wasn't a perfect solution, but at least things were starting to come together, as far as Harry was concerned.

Harry glanced over to the large entrance when the door slid upwards and Chekiath entered. He smiled at his dragon. "Full now?" he asked.

"I am. Sheep Guy got us some very tasty beasts," replied Chekiath, who settled down in his Weyr and started flexing his wings. It was a strengthening exercise which he performed every chance he got. He and Harry were flying together now and greatly enjoying themselves. But at one time he had overextended himself and the pair had been forced to land and rest for several hours. Since that time, Chekiath had been very diligent to exercise properly.

Harry chuckled. The dragons amused themselves by coming up with colorful names for people. Hence, Sheep Guy, or Lord Mills to the humans, was the one who helped Harry obtain the flock for the Weyr.

Satisfied that everything was fine with his dragon, he turned back to look at his desk and he sighed. Might as well get back to studying, he thought.

"We both need to better ourselves, Harry. You with your studying, so you can be a better Weyrleader and me with my exercising, so I can fly you better," Chekiath said with an amused rumble.

"I know, Cheki," Harry replied, then he sat at the desk. A moment later, Dobby appeared with a cup of hot tea. With another sigh, he cracked open a book and nodded his thanks to the elf.

After about an hour of reading and practicing wand movements he decided he need to stretch his legs. He went in search of Remus, who was in the main Weyr administration building. It was one of the large buildings on the base that hadn't been designed to serve as a aircraft hanger or parts storage. And it was just next door to Harry's quarters.

Remus looked up and smiled when Harry walked into the office. He had been busy transcribing what he recalled from Spath's memories concerning Sidraneth's arrival on earth.

"Him Remus. How goes the history?"

"Well enough, Harry, but I suppose some questions will never be answered properly. Or at least to Sir Robert's satisfaction," Remus replied, then he stood and walked over to a coffee pot and poured himself and Harry a cup.

Harry grinned. Each of them had experienced Sir Robert in 'scientist mode' and found it an interesting experience. Sir Robert was a stickler for details.

"He's still upset about being unable to date Sidraneth's arrival properly?"

Remus nodded. "He's convinced that somewhere in the racial memories is a clue that will give them a better idea. Some memory of a particular animal or some sort of event that will allow him to narrow it down even further. I'm not so sure, but I keep digging, and then recording what I've seen from Spath."

He chuckled and shook his head. "Sir Robert even gave me an impromptu course in recording my observations. We went on a walk around the base, then he grilled me about what we saw during the walk. It was fascinating when you think about how much we take for granted and never really notice."

Harry nodded in sympathy. He'd had the same walk around the base with Sir Robert, who seemed to feel that Harry's education was woefully inadequate. It was one of the things he intended to see corrected. The Weyrs might have magic and wizards, but they'd also have muggles, and all of them would be educated properly!

"At least your not being wired for sound and video before you jump between," Harry replied. "I don't mind flying Chekiath, but yesterday I had to jump nearly forty times to get Sir Robert enough video and temperature readings. We were exhausted by the end of the day." He ran a hand through his hair. "I suppose I shouldn't complain. He's really a nice man who's done an awful lot for us."

"And the dragons seem to like him," Remus offered.

Harry nodded in agreement. The dragons thought Sir Robert was amusing. All in all, things were really looking up.

Headmaster's office, Hogwarts, December 30th...

"Come in!" Dumbledore called.

The door opened and Draco Malfoy stepped in, followed by Severus Snape.

"Ah, young Mister Malfoy, Excellent. Thank you, Professor, that will be all," Albus said.

Snape blinked at the dismissal. "Sir, I feel that as Mister Malfoy's Head of House, I should remain."

"No, my boy, that won't be necessary. I will send Mister Malfoy back to his common room when we're done with our little chat," countered Dumbledore.

"Headmaster," protested Snape.

Dumbledore's eyes narrowed and he peered over his half rim lenses. "I said that will be all, Professor."

Snape stood for a moment longer, then he whirled and left with his robes billowing outward. He was getting increasingly difficult to deal with since the Headmaster invoked the code of conduct.

Albus picked up his candy dish and offered it to Draco. "Lemon Drop? I find them quite soothing."

Draco reached for a candy and looked at the Headmaster warily. "Am I in trouble again, Headmaster?"

"Not at all, Mister Malfoy. In fact, your behavior in recent weeks has been exemplary. I know it's been difficult with your detentions, but you served them without complaint and I've been hearing that you've been offering help in potions to some of the younger students, even students who aren't in your house."

Draco shrugged, unsure how to respond.

"Mister Malfoy, I asked you here today because I know something that you need to learn."

"Sir?"

"During the first task, you had a close encounter with a dragon, if I'm not mistaken. Perhaps the dragon even touched you?"

Draco looked at him in shock. "How did... I mean, I told no one!"

Albus held up a hand. "Relax, Mister Malfoy, you are not the only student to have been touched by dragons during that event. In fact, a number of students were confronted and each, like yourself, have experienced a shift in their behavior because of that encounter. You might wonder how I know of this and perhaps why I am telling you this now?"

Draco nodded. He desperately wanted to know what had caused him to suddenly see the world differently.

Dumbledore smiled. "Tell me, my boy, what do you know about the so called soul bond?"

Draco frowned. "Not much, sir. It's very rare, happening perhaps twice in a century. There isn't much written about them, and to be frank, I've never really been interested in them."

Dumbledore smiled, "Yes, a very esoteric topic indeed. However, one thing that is known for certain about soul bonds is that the bonded pair always exhibit personality shifts to bring them more inline with what their bonded mate wants or needs."

Draco thought about that for a moment, then his eyes widened. "Sir, are you telling me I bonded with some girl and I don't know it?"

Dumbledore chuckled. "No, Mister Malfoy. You have not bonded with a girl. When you encountered the dragon, you awoke a potential within yourself. A potential to bond with a dragon. While I'm certain your father would disagree violently, I find myself in an unusual situation of having to ask. Would you like to know more about dragons?"

"Bond with a dragon," Draco repeated softly. "Then the rumors are correct? They aren't mindless beasts?"

"I can assure you, Mister Malfoy, that while they are very different from you and I, they are very intelligent creatures. At one time they worked alongside man to help fight a terrible enemy. When Harry Potter bonded with that newborn dragon, he awoke that desire in all dragons to renew that bond.

"Harry has since provided me with a list of names, students here at the school that he says have the potential to be dragon riders like himself. You are on that list."

"My father isn't going to like this," Draco commented.

"No, he will not, but this isn't about him, Draco," Albus said softly. "You have a unique opportunity to rise above being a mere wizard and become a partner to a being that will dedicate his life to you. Harry says the bond can't be described."

"Sir," Draco said, looking embarrassed, "I'm not sure this is a good idea. I mean Potter and I never got along."

Dumbledore held up a hand, stopping him. "When I asked that same question of Harry he replied that if you bond with a dragon, there will never be a problem between you and him again. Mind you, Draco, he felt the same way about you, but is so convinced that things between you will change that he's willing to offer you a chance to bond."

"He still wants to let me try this?" exclaimed Draco.

Dumbledore nodded. "Like yourself, Mister Potter is much changed by the event."

Draco leaned back on the chair and was silent for a moment. "Sir, I know my father wouldn't approve, but since that day I've felt like something important was missing from my life. I think I'd like to try this."

Albus leaned forward across his desk. "Draco, you must realize that if you do this, there will be no turning back. You'd have to leave the school. Of course, from what I understand, Harry is arranging for continued magical and other training. But by leaving you may invoke the wrath of your parents. You and I both know your father is not the most forgiving of men."

Draco nodded and looked grim. "May I speak freely, sir?"

"Of course, Mister Malfoy. I can assure you that nothing you say to me will leave this office," Albus replied with a kindly smile.

"When the dragon came down to the stand and touched me, I felt like the dragon was trying to tell me that it was disappointed in me. It was almost like it looked at me and said 'you can do better'. Since then, I've given a lot of thought to what I've been doing and how I acted towards others. I know I've been copying my father, but I no longer want that. I don't want to be a copy of a man that believes he's better than everyone else."

He paused and took a deep breath. "My father grew up to be like his father. I don't want to be a copy anymore. That dragon touched me and told me I can be better. I want to be better, for that dragon and for myself."

He looked at Dumbledore warily. When the Headmaster smiled broadly, he felt relieved.

"Well said, Draco. I will get in touch with someone who can help you on your path to bettering yourself. I would like to help you more, but I'm afraid that if I did, some could think I'm guilty in aiding your leaving the school to pursue your dragon dreams.

With a gentle smile, the Headmaster stood up. "That will be all for now, Mister Malfoy."

Draco nodded and stood, then he turned to leave.

Albus called out to him when he reached the door. "Draco? Never forget that, even after you have impressed, I will do my best to help you and your dragon as much as I can."

Campbeltown Weyr, Scottish West Coast, January 2nd...

"Harry?"

He looked from his desk and smiled at Remus, who stood in the doorway with a woman in uniform that he didn't recognize.

"Come in, Remus. I was just going over this training plan."

Harry was building a plan to help ease potentials into the tasks of being a rider, using unbonded dragons. To that end, he was trying to expand on his own notes so that he could give them to potential riders as a guidebook.

Remus grinned and entered. "Harry, this is Captain Katherine Atkins. She's been assigned to be in charge of the military force that's providing the security here at Campbeltown.

Harry stood and looked at the brunette. She was shorter than he was, but not by much, and she had to be at least thirty years old. From her uniform and he could tell she was in the Army, unlike the previous Commander of the guard force, who was Royal Navy. "Welcome, Captain. Welcome to our Weyr," he said softly, offering a hand.

The captain looked at Remus strangely for a moment, then shook Harry's hand.

"Harry is the Weyrleader, Captain Atkins. I know his age is a problem, but he was given this particular distinction for several reasons. He is the person who woke the dragon's memories, and he is, so far, the only person capable of talking to any dragon mentally.

"They all hear him and they follow his orders," Remus concluded.

Harry looked embarrassed, "It's not like I asked for that distinction," he muttered.

Remus chuckled and slapped Harry gently on the back. "I know, Cub, but your parents would be so very proud of you."

Harry waved that off and motioned to a nearby conference table. "Please sit, Captain, and I'll answer any questions you might have."

She nodded hesitantly and took a seat, then looked at Remus pointedly.

He shrugged at her. "I wasn't kidding, Captain. The dragons answer to Harry. We have a few people here who are helping out, but Harry's the one in charge of seeing to the dragons."

Katherine sighed and shook her head. She was unused to dealing with teens, let alone one that was the only person authorized to speak for an alien intelligence.

"I've looked over the security plans in place by Captain Johnson and generally they aren't bad. We'll continue working with them and I'll beef up a few areas that I think need strengthening. I've also been told that dragons have the ability to be unobserved by humans unless they want to be seen?"

Captain Johnson had been quietly replaced after several dragons made comments to Sir Robert about not really trusting the man. The Prime Minister's office had been so concerned by their comments that he was transferred to the Falklands Naval station.

"That's correct, Captain," Harry replied. "The dragons have a number of abilities that are defying classification."

She looked at him strangely. "Would you care to explain that?"

Harry shrugged. "The dragons have the ability to teleport between places. I could take you to Hong Kong in the time it takes for us to get seated on a dragon and get airborne. That was built into their design. So was the ability to breath fire, but the original Pern standard required the dragons to chew a rock to fuel the fires. Current Earth standard dragons need no rock as fuel. Was that

factored into their original design or was it caused by something else?

"The problem, Captain, is that we simply don't know. Dragons clearly exhibit some capabilities which we believe are magic in origin, and others which we think evolved to meet the changes in their environment. Are they magic? Maybe. Some of what they can do suggests that's the case. Have they evolved from their original design? That would seem to be the case in some areas.

"So, as I said, dragons have abilities that simply defy classification," Harry said in conclusion.

Captain Atkins looked doubtful.

"Captain, you saw Momnarth earlier today, when she was working with Chekiath on his wing exercises?" asked Remus.

She nodded, wondering where he was going.

"Sir Robert brought in a portable lorry weighing station last week and asked Momnarth to stand on it. At fifty two feet long, that dragon weighed in at just under one hundred kilos. When Sir Robert explained to Momnarth what he was trying to do, she stood there, doing nothing visible, but the weight being reported climbed from one hundred kilos to over fourteen tons."

Harry grinned. "They are on the roof of this building right now, sunning themselves."

Captain Atkins swallowed nervously and glanced upwards at the roof. She shook her head and turned her attention back to the pair of men. "All right, so we won't have that much trouble unless someone breaches camp security. I'm still waiting on a list of authorized people for the camp. When can I expect that?"

Harry looked down at the table top for a moment. "Captain," he said slowly, "this isn't a real military base. We'll be bringing people in to become dragon riders. I can't give you a list of authorized personnel because it doesn't exist. It will never exist, I'm afraid. We're trying to repopulate the Weyr with the help of your government, and we'll cooperate as best as we can, but there are some issues that are

simply out of your hands. The dragons will decide who will make a good rider and who won't."

Captain Atkins shook her head. They never talked about situations like this in officer's school. But one lesson she remembered rang clear to her. When in doubt, assume that the person in charge was in charge and let them worry about things you couldn't handle.

"Very good, sir," she murmured.

Harry looked at her in surprise before shrugging it off. He wasn't used to leading anything and wasn't sure he liked it.

"Remus, you might want to warn the Captain about Sirius before she encounters him," Harry said, then he stood. "I still have some things to work over before we start receiving potential riders."

Remus and Captain Atkins watched Harry move back to his desk and shuffle some papers, before starting over. He was trying to put together a plan to introduce potential riders to dragons and ease them into caring for dragons by helping with other dragons before they get the chance to impress.

"Who's serious?" asked Captain Atkins.

Remus chuckled and turned his attention back to her. "Sirius Black is perhaps the oldest child you'll ever meet, Captain, but he is also one of the most loyal and steadfast people. Harry was right about one thing. I do need to tell you about him. He's off on a job for the Weyr at the moment, but he could be back anytime."

Captain Atkins listened to Remus with mounting horror. This man, Sirius, sounded like a total menace!

Gringotts, January 2nd...

"Next!"

A wizard stepped up to the teller. "I am Dirk Cresswell, from the Goblin Liaison Office at the Ministry. I would like to see someone in charge," said the wizard.

The goblin glanced up and scowled. Dirk Cresswell was the highest ranking muggle born wizard in the Ministry and he held a job that no one wanted or took seriously, until now.

"And the purpose of your request?"

"My Minister wants to know why you seem to still have dragons working for you while the rest of the world has lost theirs," Cresswell said uncomfortably. He didn't like treating the Goblins badly, but he had been ordered to do this by the Minister himself. "My Minister demands that Gringotts resume shipment of dragon products, even if you must use the dragons guarding the vaults."

The goblin's scowl increased and he made an intricate maneuver with his hands. A bell rang and a more ornately dressed Goblin entered the room and walked over to the teller station.

"What?" snarled the new Goblin.

"This wizard is demanding we resume dragon product shipments. He represents the British Ministry for Magic," replied the teller.

The new goblin turned to Cresswell and sneered. "Did he now? And if we refuse to accept your demand?"

Oh, shit, thought Cresswell. Time to try bluffing.

"I can assure you that if you fail to do as your told, the Ministry would take your refusal very poorly," Cresswell offered. He didn't sound very confident.

"Take this message back to your Minster," the Goblin said with a sneer. "Gringotts decides how to do business and no one, not even your Ministry, can order us around. We have reached an accommodation with the Lord of the Dragons and will not break it willingly."

Cresswell blinked and looked at the ornately dressed Goblin in shock. The Goblins had reached some sort of agreement with the dragons? Someone was representing the dragons? "I will convey your comments back to my Ministry, but I must warn you they will not look favorably on your response," Cresswell said unhappily, then he turned and left with his tail firmly tucked between his legs.

"Return to your duties," Gapsit ordered the teller. "I will speak to the Executive Council about this."

"Yes, Lord Gapsit," replied the teller.

Campbeltown Weyr, Scottish West Coast, January 3rd...

Sirius walked into the Weyr kitchen and poured himself a cup of tea. Spending his days watching the Granger house was boring as hell, but it beat hiding from the Aurors. He also spent part of his time sitting on the roof, working on some spells he wanted to teach Harry.

Remus might be the natural professor, but when it came to devious uses for spells, Sirius had him beat hands down and he wanted to pass his knowledge to Harry.

Sir Robert sat down across the table and nodded agreeably to Sirius. Sirius found the little man amusing, if a bit enigmatic.

"How are things going, Sir Robert?" asked Sirius with an amused grin.

"Smashing, my boy, simply smashing! Here, look at this," said the scientist, as he held out a silver container. He unscrewed the lid and Sirius leaned away from the blast of heat. Inside the thermal container was a rock. "Look! This rock has been radiating heat for a week now and there hasn't been a single degree drop since then."

The old man screwed the lid back on and looked at Sirius smugly. "This is just astounding, my boy. The implications are tremendous!"

Sirius nodded with more than a bit of confusion. Sir Robert waved to him and picked up his precious container and his tea and walked from the room muttering about thermal coefficients and radiant absorption rates.

"From the look on your face, you didn't understand a word he said," said someone standing behind him.

He turned and spotted a young woman staring at him in curiosity.

He grinned easily at her. "Well, not really. But if Sir Robert is happy with his glowing rock, who am I to make him unhappy by demanding explanations?"

She smiled tightly and nodded to the empty seat. "May I?"

"Please," he replied, half rising.

She sat and offered her hand. "I'm Katherine Atkins."

He gripped her hand and was surprised at how firm a grip she had. "Sirius Black," he said smoothly.

She arched one delicate eyebrow at him. "I've been told about you, Mister Black. Imagine my surprise when I looked you up and found that even my people knew about your escape from prison. Our manhunt for you was nearly as large as the one your own people ran."

Sirius' smile slipped and he stared at her for a moment.

"Captain, I'll thank you to not badger my Godfather. Did your file on him also explain how he was placed into prison without trial or interrogation?" Harry said frostily from behind her.

She started and turned around. She was startled by the young man's fierce expression, and the fact that his eyes seemed to glow.

"Harry," Sirius said hastily, "relax. She doesn't know. I'll explain it to her."

Harry turned his attention to Sirius for a moment. Then, taking a deep breath, he nodded. "Fine," he said shortly, then spun on his heel and walked away.

Katherine watched him for a moment longer. It had been the first time she felt the brunt of his presence and his power and she was shocked by the feeling.

"I'm sorry about that, Katherine, but Harry's rather protective of Remus and I. In his eyes, we're the only family he has left besides his dragon," Sirius said softly.

He sipped his drink and watched her carefully.

"I'm sorry if I upset him, but I'm in charge of security here at the base. I'm sure you can understand my concern when I discovered that you were an escaped prisoner convicted of mass murder."

"I didn't kill anyone. Through a series of stupid moves on my part, I ended up in jail after my best friends were murdered. I waited for days, then weeks, then months, expecting to talk to someone, to be taken to trial where I could plead my side of the story. But they never came."

Sirius looked at her grimly. "I am Harry's Godfather. That means that I took a magical vow to protect him and see to his care to the best of my ability. Had I betrayed his parents as I was accused of, the vow would have taken my life," he said quietly. "As it stands, the only reason why it didn't kick in was because I was put in prison against my will. Had I willingly let Harry grow up the way he did, the vow I took would have killed me."

Katherine stared at Sirius in shock for a moment. "I'm sorry. I assumed."

He waved her to silence. "I understand. Even today my Ministry is ignoring evidence that would clear my name because it would make them look bad in the eyes of the wizarding public."

She sighed and looked down at her cup of tea. "I guess I got off on the wrong foot with you and now I owe Harry an apology."

Sirius shrugged. "It wouldn't hurt to apologize to Harry, but you don't need to apologize to me. You didn't know the circumstances and were simply doing your job."

He paused and looked pained. "I know that Remus probably warned you about me. I'll freely admit that I'm a big kid a lot of the time. I was barely twenty one when I was placed in the closest thing to hell on this planet and I spent over a decade there. I escaped because I learned Harry was in danger and I needed to help him. Instead of helping him, he saved my life, not once, but twice. I'd do anything for that young man."

He shrugged uncomfortably. "I like to laugh. I need to laugh. After a decade in hell, laughing reminds me that I'm still alive. But I can be deadly serious when it comes to that boy and his well being."

He drained his cup and stood. "I'll see you around the Weyr," he said, then he turned and walked away.

"Well, damn," Katherine muttered to herself. She had met intense men before but this one was beyond her experience. His gaze had pinned her and held her attention unlike any other she had experienced before. "That was a total balls up."

Campbeltown Weyr, Scottish West Coast, January 4th...

"Good morning, Harry."

Harry looked up and spotted May standing nearby, watching him. As usual, he blushed slightly and she smiled at him.

May had experienced some rough times with some local boys and Harry was turning out to be something unusual for the young woman. He was interested, but too shy to do anything about it. It boosted her confidence and taught her that a boy could be truly interested in her friendship without trying to get into her pants.

"Inspection day again?" she asked.

Harry nodded. "Good morning, May. And yes, it's inspection day. If you're ready, pick a dragon and start checking them. The quicker we get this done, the quicker it'll be over."

May nodded and walked over to a Chinese Fireball that had been watching her carefully. Once a week they made a visual check of the local dragons and decided who needed additional help from Hagrid. Hagrid was out of the Weyr today, making rounds on Selanth to the other Weyrs, working on dragons too sick to make the jump between to Campbeltown.

Harry had laid down the law among the dragons. No one with a badly damaged scale or an infection was to go Between and the dragons were following that rule. Hagrid left the Weyr three days a week to visit sick dragons and do what he could for them. Surprisingly, the muggle anti-biotic was turning out to be very

effective when coupled with some magical remedies to help control the pain.

May had been assisting Hagrid, hoping to become a Weyrhealer, and could usually be found at the Weyr on the weekends.

May stepped back and nodded to the Fireball, who thanked her. Then she turned and spotted Chekiath. She frowned and glanced over at Harry. His dragon was watching him carefully as he checked over a Romanian Longhorn.

"Cath, you're healing well. I want Hagrid to look at you before you go Between again, but I think you're just about healed," Harry said.

"Thank you, Weyrleader," replied Cath.

"Harry!" called May.

He looked up to see her motioning him to come over to where she stood. He looked around and saw only a few more yearlings to go, so he walked over to her. "What's up, May?"

"Harry are you sure Chekiath is well?" she asked quietly.

He chuckled and nodded his head. "You mean his coloring?" Chekiath, as he grew, was lightening up and gaining a very metallic sheen to his scales. Where Spath had a hint of bronze in his scales and Momnarth had nearly none, Chekiath's coloring was turning distinctly bronze.

May nodded.

"A group of us, including Chekiath, discussed it at the nightly council a few days ago. He feels fine, but his coloring is becoming more like what we'd consider Pern standard. Each of the Pern dragons had a metallic sheen to their coloring and eyes that were faceted, almost like jewels."

"Faceted like jewels?" May repeated with a slight smile. She could almost see the eyes in her mind.

"That's right. Sir Robert thinks the strange eyes were a deliberate design, with a hard outer layer to protect the eye from thread. Since

the dragons here don't have thread to deal with, they slowly lost that hard shell in favor of a soft eyelid. But they retained the emotive coloring and the twirling of the pupils.

"As for Chekiath and future dragons, we now think that, as more riders become available, we'll start to see a return to the Pern Standard in some ways. Remus thinks the loss of human riders is what prompted some of the changes we see today."

May looked around at the other dragons who showed no signs of the changes Harry spoke of, then she turned back to him. "So if," she began.

"No if, when," Harry replied firmly, interrupting her.

She looked at him in surprise, then smiled slightly. "You really think I'll impress a dragon then?"

He nodded. "All the dragons think you'd make a good rider and I know several that wish they were still young enough to impress so they could bond with you. For myself, I think you will make a very good rider. You're great with the dragons and they can usually tell if a person is trustworthy or not."

She blushed and looked away. Harry was too busy looking over the few remaining dragons to notice his comments affecting her the way they had.

"My dragon would be like Chekiath?"

He looked at her curiously. "What do you mean?"

She gestured to his dragon. "The dragon would be closer to Pern standard?"

"Oh," Harry exclaimed, looking at Chekiath. "Yes, we believe so. We don't think they'll develop the jeweled eyes again, but we think the coloring will return to the original design or something close to it. Sir Robert thinks that if we gave it enough time, we might see a split where the existing breeds remain what they are, but our dragons eventually breeding back to the original design. Sleek, large and bred to fight thread."

She shivered involuntarily and he glanced over at her. "What is it?" he asked.

"I was just thinking about how scared and desperate they must have been, the people who created our dragons. They traveled so far only to be struck by an enemy they didn't understand and had no way of fighting."

He nodded. "Sir Robert showed me a video of something he thinks was like thread. We have them here on the planet, but they're much slower and a lot less dangerous. Mycorrhizal fungus, he called it," Harry said, then he trailed off after stumbling over the difficult word. It was something beyond his experience. He had missed years of science and math classes by attending Hogwarts and it bothered him.

She glanced at him and tried to give him an encouraging smile. She had quickly learned that he was deficient in several areas, so she had taken it upon herself to tutor him in math when she came to the Weyr every weekend. Lord Mills had given her some money to order extra copies of her school textbooks and Harry did try to study from them.

Lord Mills felt they would be better able to help Harry with his schooling once they had more riders on hand. Given the required age limits, schooling would be a necessity at the Weyr.

May realized that Harry was a bit too embarrassed to continue their conversation, so she waved for the next dragon in line to come over and be inspected. Harry Potter is an enigma, she thought to herself. I know he's attracted to me, but he never does anything more than try to be friends.

Harry waved to another dragon. He wanted to get the inspection over with. He liked May, but he couldn't help but feel stupid around her. It wasn't quite the same with Hermione, but that was only because they learned the same subjects.

#10 Downing Street, London, January 5th...

The Prime Minister looked up from the complex report with graphs of thermal emissions and radiative energies and sighed. "Sir Robert, I

know this is important, but could you possibly explain this in terms I can understand?" he said plaintively.

Sir Robert grinned and reached for his ever present thermal bottle. "Sir, it boils down to one critical factor. Energy. Dragons are capable of supplying us with a massive amount of energy without causing undue stress on themselves.

"We are all familiar with the concept of coal and oil fired generators which make steam to turn turbines, which in turn generates electricity. The dragons represent a source of heat energy without burning oil or coal."

He unscrewed the cap on the bottle and the air above the bottle roiled from the heat. "The rock contained in this bottle has been radiating a constant 105 degrees centigrade for the past ten days. At my request, a dragon created this rock for me. It was a simple task for the dragon and it was well within the design parameters of my thermal container. The dragon could have easily produced a rock that would have melted the bottle."

The Prime Minister eyed the glowing red rock for a moment, then he nodded to Sir Robert who capped it again.

"So you're telling me that the dragons could be a source of free energy?"

Sir Robert frowned. "No, sir. I'm telling you that the dragons could be persuaded to provide us with a source of energy in exchange for things they need. While I realize that most countries pay hard currency for oil and coal these days, dragons really don't need or want money. They are willing to work in exchange for what they need. Food supplies, places to live, recognition that they have the right to be allowed to live like any other people."

"Sir Robert," the PM said painfully, "we can't go back to a simple barter economy, even for another intelligence. Why not set up an account for the dragons and let a human proxy handle it for them? Lord Mills, for example, is in a prime position to do such and it would keep the group that knows about the dragons small."

Sir Robert shrugged. "It would work as long as Harry approves it."

The Prime Minister frowned. "I am uneasy with the fact that a boy is the sole leader of these beings. Can't we do something about that?"

"Sir, you are just going to have to face the fact that he is in charge until the dragons say otherwise. If I may suggest, rather than feeling uneasy, help the lad. If he feels that you've been helping him and his dragons, he'll be more acceptable to suggestions from us. His sole priority is taking care of his dragons, but he's still a teen and he needs help.

"He's been poorly schooled, thanks to the magicals. The base is mostly empty, except for stuff he and his friends have purchased. I know for a fact that he's emptied his parent's trust account to pay for the herds of sheep. I don't know his financial story. He seems well off, but we could help there.

"The base itself is bare. There are few books, no radios other than what the guard force brought with them. They even eat with the guard force. With the plans in place for bringing in more potential riders it's going to severely strain what they have."

The Prime Minister nodded thoughtfully. "I see what you mean. Very well, I have to brief the Queen on this business later in the week. If I'm not mistaken, she's hoping to meet with the dragons at some point."

Sir Robert nodded. He had expected that much. He was long used to putting on the proverbial dog and pony show for the people who held the purse strings.

"I'll see your funding is increased, Sir Robert, and get with Harry and Lord Mills to discuss setting up a way to pay the dragons for their services."

Sir Robert closed his brief case, then grabbed his precious thermal bottle. He nodded happily to the PM before leaving the room.

The PM turned back to another report he hadn't shared with Sir Robert but would soon. The government had started looking for British Wizards who were unhappy with the Wizarding world and had hit pay dirt big time. As Sir Robert noted, all of these people had a unique personal signature that gave them away. They vanished from the muggle world at age eleven, only to return some years later and

all of them entered some sort of remedial education program before finding careers in the muggle world.

They located them, en masse, because they all lacked sufficient education when they returned to the muggle world.

When the idea was first brought up, it was thought that it wouldn't help them find many wizards. As normal humans, they couldn't see someone wanting to live a life without magic. They didn't know about the rampant bias against muggle born in the magical world, however.

The PM was pleased. It had been an oddball idea to look for these people, but they had found them by the hundreds, in all walks of life, including the military and the police forces. Even now, the Government was pulling these people together and organizing them.

Headmaster's office, Hogwarts, January 7th...

Dumbledore waited until the elf had left and Minerva was seated with her tea, then he invoked a series of complex privacy charms on the room to prevent anyone from listening in.

She nodded in approval and waited a few moments longer before speaking. "I see that you finished talking to all of the students on the list that Harry gave you."

Albus nodded and reached for his own cup of tea. "Yes, although I was quite surprised by some of the responses. Young Malfoy is more changed than we originally thought. I daresay he's about a step away from disassociating himself from his father. He and I spoke at length and I found it quite refreshing. I won't say he's lost all of his arrogance, but he is not the same spoiled little rich boy he once was."

Minerva nodded thoughtfully. "I can see that. He actually organized a small study group for some first years in potions. Snape was livid over his idea of helping some Hufflepuffs and even the inclusion of two Slytherins didn't calm him down.

"And the others?" she asked.

Albus chuckled. "About what you might expect. Most were very eager, although Miss Lovegood seemed to be the least disturbed by

the concept. I think, somehow, she already knew and was just waiting for me to call her. Miss Bones is worried about her Aunt, but committed to learning more about the dragons.

"Miss Bulstrode merely looked at it as a means to escape an unhappy home life. No, most were about as expected.

"Each of these students is being offered a chance at something we can only dream of, Minerva. I wish we didn't have to approach this so illicitly, but with the Ministry acting the way they are, we have no choice in the matter. Perhaps someday it will be normal for us to provide potential riders, but that day isn't today."

"Albus, about Miss Granger," Minerva began.

Dumbledore frowned. "I am worried too, Minerva. I sent word to Harry with Fawkes this morning, but there is little else I can do about the situation. Her parents opting to withdraw her from the school has left them all vulnerable to the Ministry. Since I disbanded the Board, I'm not obligated to inform the Ministry, but sooner or later, you can be sure some student will mention it in passing in a letter."

Minerva shook her head unhappily. "I wish we could do more. Should we warn them?"

Dumbledore looked decidedly unhappy. "We dare not. As much as I want to warn Miss Granger, if that warning were to fall into the Ministry hands, we'd be arrested in minutes and nothing Hogwarts can do could help us. Our responsibility is to our students. Like Harry, Miss Granger has removed herself from our responsibility. If Harry heeds my warning, and I think he will, he will take it upon himself to warn Miss Granger and her family. I even offered the use of Fawkes to deliver such a message."

"Where did we go wrong, Albus? Why are we losing such promising students? Harry and Miss Granger. That list of potential riders represents some of the strongest and best of our students. Where did we go wrong?"

Dumbledore sighed heavily. "We failed to live up to their expectations. Harry left because school life was only marginally better than his home life. I daresay Miss Granger left because she rightfully felt the school wasn't safe. The others are being offered a

way of life that promises something far better than what they have now. Magic has so much to offer and we've failed to show that to our students."

Minerva stood and smiled weakly at Dumbledore. "Well, we'll just have to try harder with our remaining students."

Albus nodded ruefully. "Yes, we shall try harder. Thank you, Minerva, for your help and your support. I know the past few months have been exceedingly difficult."

She nodded and left the room. Dumbledore glanced up at Fawkes. "Difficult times, eh, my friend? They do say difficult times are what make or break us. Hopefully we're not going to break."

Fawkes looked at his wizard and trilled a soft note of comfort. He didn't believe Albus would break. He had made some bad decisions, but he was making real progress in correcting his path.

Magic or Science? That is one of the principle debates surrounding the dragons. We know for a fact that the dragons have several key abilities that were engineered into them, and others that seemed to have evolved over time. The dragon's ability to control their own weight, or their ability to channel the cold of Between, seem to be less part of their design and more magic, but it's doubtful that anyone will know for sure.

Excerpt from The Weyrs of Earth by Remus John Lupin, published 2040.

Authors notes and mockeries:

LadyGray87: The world mocks you for asking a question and having replies turned off. Neener neener neener. You would have gotten a nice private reply, but now you have trillions of sentient beings across the galaxy mocking you and eating your donuts. Too bad.

- As stated in chapter one's authors notes, we will endeavor to update once week. So begging for a new chapter is not going to get you anywhere. Bribes on the other hand, well, there's a really nice 16in telescope from Meade that might get you a chapter early. New Computers would also work.

- Icis, yeah its a long jump. But just think that for a brief moment Sidraneth managed to tap into her own personal improbability drive. Just be thankful she didn't arrive as a sofa.

- For all those trying to come up with all sorts of reasons why the dragons changed etc. Stop it. We know why the dragons changed. They have been on the planet long enough for natural selection to affect them. That's a good enough reason if you ask me.

- Charlie Weasley in this story? Nope, not going to happen. He's a dragon handler and part of the group that routinely killed dragons for their parts. No dragon would willingly accept him. He might love his dragons, but then living in Idaho we know cattle ranchers that love their cattle. That doesn't stop them from sending them to market. And don't ask about the guys in Wyoming... I mean really, they take it too far!

- Muggledad in an act of revenge, offered the following omake. Please send your hatemail, email bombs and the like to him. In all candor I have to admit I sent him a few omakes concerning his very good WIP that I recommend to everyone.

"So, tonight is your first real date with May?" Sirius prodded his godson. Harry was in front of the mirror, fiddling with his shirt. "You two have been dancing about each other long enough."

"Padfoot..." Harry sighed.

"Look, she's got her dragon now, there's no reason for you to hold back. I'd tell you to jump the girl if I didn't know she could kick your arse."

Another sigh accompanied Harry's drooping head. "Padfoot..."

There was a rustling that caused Harry to look up. Seeing the maniac grin on his godfather's face caused Harry to gulp in fear. As Sirius rummaged in the paper sack, Harry tried to run out of the room but a timely Tripping Jinx stopped him. "Ah, ah, no running away."

"Padfoot!" the Boy Who Lived protested.

"I got you stuff!" Padfoot exclaimed to the now rising teen. Flinging objects from the bag, Sirius grinned broadly. First, Harry caught a wadded up piece of parchment. Unfolding it, Harry blushed. "The Contraception charm?"

"Catch!"

"Contraception potion?" Harry exclaimed in outrage.

"Catch!"

Catching the plastic bag in his left hand, Harry heard Sirius tell him, "I went to the Chemist over in Edinburgh."

Harry stopped digging in the white plastic bag, "You went to Edinburgh? You had Norendrath take you to a city with a population of over four hundred thousand people?"

"He wanted to go!" Sirius protested. "He had fun." A wave of his hand preceded, "But we're getting off the topic. The very vivacious lady at the Chemist's helped me get you those." He winked saucily before adding, "And I got her number."

With more than a bit of trepidation, Harry opened the plastic bag. "Condoms? Good God, Padfoot! What do you think we'll be doing? It's just dinner and the cinema!"

"Yeah, and dragons don't have a backseat," Sirius groaned. Clapping his hand about Harry's shoulders, Sirius struck a pose worthy of Sir Galahad, "But fear not, young Potter! I have faith in you! Go forth and conquer."

Surrendering to the lunacy of his godfather, Harry chucked all Padfoot's 'gifts' into the drawer. As he walked out the door, Harry called over his shoulder, "You're an idiot. Goodnight and don't wait up for me."

Now having posted this I'll say that the sexuality of the dragons is going to play an intense part of this story. The riders will be confronted with issues that haven't been dealt with since Pern. May will be a key player, but then so will several others. AND NO, THIS IS NOT A HAREM STORY.

Bob and Alyx do not write harems, we don't believe in them, and when we write smut, we write tasteful smut.

Muggledad is probably afraid to post his latest chapter now. Its late and he knows I now owe him an omake.

Standard Disclaimer:

"I've decided to do something different!" Bob announced, then he stood and faced the audience who sat patiently waiting.

"What are you going to do?" exclaimed Alyx fearfully.

"I'm going to ad lib the disclaimer!"

"What?" she screeched.

"You heard me, I'm going to ad lib the disclaimer. I can't think of something witty to write because 3 or 4 people complained about the disclaimers, they have disrupted my Chi!"

"Your what?"

"My Chi!"

"Bless you!" said Alyx, "Now what has been disrupted?"

"My Chi!"

"Are you catching a cold?" she asked, looking at him worriedly. She didn't have any Bob cold medicine in the house and the liquor store was still closed. Plus she wasn't welcome in there any more. She didn't understand why they didn't offer samples. It seemed logical to her.

"My Chi Chi Chi!" Bob exclaimed pulling on his hair.

"That's it! You're getting sick! Bend over! I need to take your temperature!"

Bob blanched and backed away fearfully while Alyx rummaged in her bag of party gags and explosive devices.

"Ummm no thanks. I'll just pretend we gave the disclaimer. They know we don't own Harry Potter or the Dragon Riders of Pern," Bob said, still backing away.

"Can we do that?" Alyx asked. She was still rummaging around in her bag after removing a pipe wrench and a blow torch.

"Of course, I'm the author, I can do anything."

Alyx sighed and faced the audience. "I'm not sure this is legal, but enjoy the chapter people. I'll see if I can nurse Bob through his illness."

"I FEEL BETTER!" Bob bellowed from offstage.

"No," Alyx muttered, swinging her wrench, "but you will."

Most of the world's population of dragons are kept safely in reserves scattered around the world. There, they are well treated except for the occasional humane culling which caring dragon handlers perform reluctantly. The rumors of dragons being available for private hunting has never been proven.

Excerpt from *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find them* by Newt Scamander.

Campbeltown Weyr, Scottish West Coast, January 7th...

Harry looked between Lord Mills and Sir Robert. "So the dragons will be heating some rocks and you'll be hauling them away to run tests on them?"

"Well, some of them," Sir Robert said. "There's a lot of engineering to do but we're running tests on the heated rocks. For now however the government is going to set up an account with Barclay's. Lord Mills will be managing the fund until you ask for control of it. I don't expect you to do that until after you've reached adulthood, Harry."

Harry nodded. It made sense to him and he trusted James to handle the money. In a way he was very relieved. He had emptied his trust vault to pay for things but his ready cash was quickly running out.

"How are we approaching this?" asked Remus. When Sir Robert looked at him he shrugged. "I know something of the muggle world, Sir Robert, and I'm curious. Are the dragons earning an amount equal to a typical muggle fuel source? The rocks, once heated, aren't a fuel source. Coal needs to be burned to move a steam engine, so the coal is fuel. But the dragons aren't providing fuel, they are providing energy. And if I understand this rightly, the energy they

are providing lasts a very long time. Far longer than anything you currently have, in fact."

The two muggles looked at each other in consternation. Remus was right. The dragons were providing something better than fuel and their original idea to consider the heated rocks like tons of coal just wasn't going to work.

Harry shook his head and looked at the three. "I understand how important this is, but perhaps you three should work it out and tell me about it when you're done."

"Harry, I'm sorry," Remus said.

"No, you're right to bring this up now, Remus. But the simple fact is, there isn't enough time in the day for me as it is. I trust you to see that something is worked out so everyone is happy," Harry said, cutting him off.

Remus nodded and turned to the others. "Shall we retire to my office then?"

"Before we do that," Sir Robert said in a serious tone, "I want to address one other issue with Harry. I have been considering your position in regard to the time travel abilities of the dragons and I see the point you are making. We here in the Weyr will know of the ability, and I will personally brief both the PM and her Majesty about the ability and its pitfalls.

"As of now, I'm going to use the powers of my office to declare that ability as 'Most Secret'. The general story of how the dragons were engineered will become known, but we'll never officially say who did that engineering or how they arrived on our planet. We'll just say they arrived a very long time ago."

Harry nodded gratefully to the scientist. It had been an issue between them when Sir Robert discovered that Harry had forbidden any dragon to go Between times at the request of a human. All dragons now knew they needed his permission and he intended to be very strict about anyone messing up the time line. The only exception he allowed for was a dragon could go Between times to escape injury or death.

"Thank you, Sir Robert. I'm glad you see my point. I just wish I had been able to express it better," Harry replied with a smile.

The old man nodded, then motioned to Remus and James and they filed from the office.

Harry watched them leave, then turned back to his own problems.

He wiped at his face tiredly and looked at the pile of papers and parchments on his desk. His days were exhausting. Remus had asked Captain Atkins to help Harry with a light exercise routine and her response was to make him go out jogging with her every morning. It was a quite a sight to see - the Captain and Harry out running around one of the runways with Chekiath trotting after them.

The first day the captain actually ran because Cheki kept growling at her. The dragon found it most amusing.

After showering from his morning run, he typically spent three hours studying in the morning, then another four hours after lunch working with the dragons or flying drills with Chekiath. Evenings would continue their nightly council meetings, which were expanded to include Captain Atkins. They even continued with the evening bonfire on weekends so the dragons could participate.

Harry's eyes roamed tiredly over the desk until he spotted the letter from Dumbledore. Fawkes had delivered it this morning and he'd yet to read it.

"More bad news, I bet," he grumbled, but he unrolled the parchment anyway.

Harry,

As we feared, Hermione Granger has not returned to school. While no one at the school will officially report her missing, I cannot discount someone doing it unofficially or perhaps even a student mentioning it in a letter home.

Should that come to pass, the Ministry is sure to move against her and her parents. As much as I'd like to warn her about the impending problem, I cannot do so without risk. As I once told you, Harry, even if you do not consider her your friend any longer, do not

let anger sway you from helping her. She made a mistake, which she truly regretted.

Should you wish, Fawkes will convey a note of warning to the Grangers from you. Hedwig is a fine owl but she is far too conspicuous for you to risk.

Albus

Harry sighed loudly and closed his eyes for a moment, thinking. He'd write the note warning Hermione, but he also needed to pass a warning to Sirius.

"Norendrath?"

"Weyrleader?" came a startled reply.

"I'm sorry for startling you, Norendrath, but could you pass a message to Sirius, please? Tell him the Headmaster is certain the Ministry will be coming for Hermione and her parents, but he doesn't know when."

There was a moment of silence while Harry listened and never noticed the seat opposite his being filled by May.

"I've told him, Weyrleader. He says he'll be extra watchful."

"Thank you, Norendrath. Please be careful and look out for Sirius for me."

"I'll watch out for Smelly Dog, Weyrleader. He's a good friend and very funny."

Harry smiled and broke the connection.

"You look tired," May commented.

He blinked and looked at her in surprise. She hadn't been there a moment ago. "When did you get here?"

She smiled. "I passed Remus and the others heading for his office, and you were talking with a dragon. You get this faraway look in

your eyes when you talk to one and you rarely notice things around you at the time. Is there a problem?"

Harry sighed and looked down at his desk. "Maybe. One of my friends from my old school failed to return to the school after the break. The Ministry knows she's a good friend of mine, so they may try to use her to get to me. Sirius has been watching their house. At best, the Ministry will try to wipe their memories of the magical world."

He looked up at her. "So, what are you doing here on a weekday?"

She glanced at his dragon, then back to him. "Chekiath bespoke to me tonight. He's worried about you and said you didn't eat enough at dinner. Momnarth offered me a ride and I took her up on it."

Harry looked at Chekiath sourly. "My own dragon is playing nursemaid now?" he exclaimed.

"He's just worried about you, Harry," May countered. "All the dragons are. You've been pushing very hard lately for them and they are worried that you'll make yourself sick."

"You have been working too hard and not getting enough sleep. I thought perhaps May and you could just talk and relax," Chekiath said, staring at him from his sand bed, his eyes twirling slowly and tinged with yellow.

He sighed again and stood. "Would you like to walk over to the kitchen? They keep part of it open twenty four hours to serve the security force."

She smiled and fell into step with him. "So, this girl from school. Did you fancy her?"

"Hermione?" Harry asked, looking surprised. When she nodded, he frowned in thought. "I don't know. She's always been a close friend and I suppose that could have happened between us. Maybe it would have happened, but I'm not sure."

"So, she's not a girlfriend?" she asked, pressing the issue.

Harry chuckled. "No, she's not. She was a very good friend until this year. I suppose she's still a good friend, but we have some issues to iron out first. She's on the list of students the dragons were interested in."

May frowned at that, but he couldn't see her expression in the darkness. "I'm sure you'll work it out with her," she offered slowly, then she linked her arm with his. "You are a good friend."

Harry paused for a moment, unsure what to do about their linked arms, then he shrugged and continued walking. "I didn't have a lot of friends growing up, so I learned to treasure those I did have."

He stopped at the door to the kitchen and pulled it open for May. She smiled at him and entered, thankful to be out of the cold. He followed behind, sure that he had missed something, but he didn't know what.

The Dragon History, Volume Three...

Spath watched Remus approach with amusement in his eyes. Remus was popular with the dragons because he truly cared for them, almost as much as the Weyrleader did.

"Ready for another history lesson, Wolf?" asked Spath. They had left Campbeltown to come back to Disko, where Remus and Spath could converse in peace. The steam from the hot springs were also a comfort to the old dragon, easing his aches.

"Please, Spath. I have seen a great many things, thanks to your help, but I am still trying to understand everything that is involved," Remus replied.

Spath moved towards their favorite spot near the bubbling hot springs. Remus sat down on the rocks, while Spath carefully slid into the waters. These pools were at or near the boiling point of water and he didn't want to splash any water on Remus.

"Our history is marked by important points, Wolf," the old dragon said, then groaned in pleasure as he sank into the heated water. "Sidraneth's arrival and laying was a major point, another was her passing. Behold the sundering that split us into different kinds."

Remus once again found himself sunk into the memory, only this time he was in a caldera, which he thought might be Disko, though he wasn't sure. There were thousands of dragons present. Spath had explained about the dragon's ability to control how many eggs were laid and how Sidraneth had ordered the dragons to lay as many as possible to increase their chances of survival.

Spath had explained that they had to lay many eggs and there had been a high incidence of eggs that never hatched. Even with greens and gold laying, the dragons were hard pressed to restore their numbers. Remus knew part of the reason stemmed from the fact that they were all related. Wizards might not understand genetics, but even they understood that brother doesn't marry sister.

Remus gasped as a great Golden Queen stepped from the mouth of the cave. She had to be the largest dragon Remus had ever seen, easily topping seventy feet or more.

The Queen stretched her neck and started to keen loudly. Her cry was picked up by the others around the bowl and Remus burst into tears without knowing why.

"Dragons," said the Queen, "Sidraneth had passed Between for the last time. May she find her Fara."

A mournful keening arose in the Weyr that continued for several minutes, then a large bronze nearly as big as the queen stood and bellowed. Again the dragons in the bowl fell silent.

He turned away from the queen and started to walk away. As he did, others fell in line behind him.

"Granth," called the Queen, "where are you going?"

Granth turned to the Queen. "Sidraneth is no more. She can no longer lead us and this place is unsuitable for our kind. For more turns than I can count she has held us here, but no longer. I and my mate will find ourselves a new place to make a Weyr."

"But Sidraneth's orders!" protested the Queen.

"Naranth, every turn we go further and further to find food beasts while our Weyr grows colder. The herds are moving away from the

cold and I will lead my clan towards the warmth," Granth said, then he turned again and took wing. Several hundred dragons joined him as they turned south and flew away from the bowl.

Naranth stood shocked. She never thought that Granth was doing anything more than just mouthing off. Her shock deepened as other clans took wing and fled the original Weyr. She bowed her head in pain and when she looked up again, barely a thousand dragons remained of Sidraneth's kin.

"Granth was right. We must find a place with more food," Naranth said. "I had hoped we would stay together, but the bond we had with Sidraneth is gone. Now we are truly on our own."

Remus leaned back and wiped at his eyes. Sidraneth had managed to save dragon kind but she was the glue that held them together. Once she had passed, the dragons began to split up into the clans that would evolve into the different breeds they know of today.

"The great sundering split us into groups and, over time, contact between groups grew less and less. We looked at those from another clan as outsiders and were wary of them. Sidraneth saved us, but she could not prevent us from breaking apart," Spath said softly. "I will rest for a bit here, then we will return to the Weyr, Wolf. Be at peace. The Weyrleader is bringing us back together like it should be."

Granger Household in Crawley, January 8th...

Emma Granger had just placed a platter of eggs on the table when Fawkes appeared in a burst of fire and she yelped.

"Mum!" Hermione exclaimed, "its the Headmaster's Phoenix. He must have a message, probably from Dumbledore."

Fawkes trilled a relaxing note and Emma stared at the bird in wonder.

Hermione untied the message from Fawkes' leg and started to read it. As she did, she paled.

"Dear, what's wrong?" asked Emma.

She looked up from the letter. "Thank you, Fawkes," she said softly. The large bird gazed at her for a moment before springing aloft and vanishing in a ball of flame. "Mum, let's go talk with Dad. This is serious."

Mystified, Emma followed her daughter back upstairs. She knocked on her parent's door and waited for her father's permission to enter.

"I received a letter, but it isn't from Dumbledore, it's from my friend, Harry," Hermione said. "I'll read it to you."

Hermione,

Headmaster Dumbledore loaned me the use of his phoenix and asked me to pass along a warning. You and your parents are in great danger. Right now, the Ministry of Magic does not know you have withdrawn from school, but the fact that you're Muggle Born means they don't consider you a real witch until you've taken your O..

Headmaster Dumbledore says they will obliviate you and your parents, removing your memories of the magical world. But he's also concerned that they may try to hurt you in an attempt to find me. The Headmaster has kept me up to date on what is happening at the Ministry and I know they have placed a price on my head. I'm sorry if this means they may take it out on you, but you are now a target, simply because you left the school. Had you stayed at school they wouldn't have been able to touch you.

I honestly don't know how to feel, Hermione. What you did hurt as much as any beating from one of my loving relatives. But you were my friend once and I don't have so many friends that I can afford to throw one away either. We have things to discuss at some point. For now, it's more important that you and your parents remain safe.

Should the Ministry come for you, I want you to remember one important fact. As scary as they may look, you have a friend among the dragons and no dragon would ever harm you or your parents. Remember that! Dragons are your friends.

We'll see each other soon. Until then, be well and stay safe.

Harry

Hermione looked up from reading the letter again, her eyes filled with unshed tears. Emma sat slowly on the bed and looked at her husband. "Oh, Dan, what will we do?"

Dan turned to Hermione. "Did you know about this?" he asked angrily.

"No, Dad. I didn't know that withdrawing would cause this kind of problem. I knew the Ministry wanted Harry, but I never dreamed they'd hurt us in an attempt to draw him out. I mean, that's not what governments do!" she replied.

Emma shook her head. "Hermione, these are the same people that forced your friend to face a dragon. Why on earth would you believe for a minute that they would act in a civilized manner? One of these days you are going to have to develop a healthy distrust of people in authority. This blind faith of yours is dangerous."

Hermione flushed and looked down.

"Pumpkin, what did Harry mean about dragons being our friends?" Dan asked softly. He knew she was hurting and Emma's comment hadn't helped.

Hermione shrugged. "I'm not sure. Harry would go out of his way to help a friend, Dad, even if he got hurt in the process. Before this year I thought I knew him, but I guess I didn't know him as well as I thought I did. From his letter, I wouldn't put it past him to have someone watching to make sure we're safe."

"Em, call Connie and have her cancel our appointments for this week. Tell her I've got the flu and you're afraid you're going to get it. I want us all close together for the next few days while we try to figure this out. Hermione, is there anyone we can turn to in that world that might be able to help us?" Dan asked.

Hermione shook her head. "I don't know, Dad. Before today I would have said a lot of people. Dumbledore's warning came through Harry. Obviously he doesn't want to be accused of helping us."

Up on the roof, Norendrath finished relaying the conversation to Sirius. "Smelly Dog, I don't understand. The Fuzzy One is scared

and so are the Teeth Pullers. Why don't we just bring them to the Weyr? You know the Fuzzy One should be there for the hatching."

Sirius nodded. "I know, my friend, but if we were to barge in now, the adults would never see the problem for what it is. They'd never take it seriously. I don't like it, but it's the truth. They would only come to the Weyr unwillingly."

"The Weyrleader is concerned about the Fuzzy One," added Norendrath.

"I know," Sirius replied, "but there's nothing we can do until they are in trouble."

"Very well," Norendrath replied, then sighed and looked around. "Shall we continue, then?" When the man nodded, the dragon shifted position a bit and put his head down on his paws. "I spy with my little eye, something green."

Sirius looked about eagerly, I spy was a nice way to pass the time.

Office of the Minister for Magic, January 14th...

Dirk Cresswell was fuming. For over a week he had tried to contact the Minister in order to report on his trip to Gringotts. He had even tried to write a report and send it to the Minister, only to have the Senior Undersecretary return the report, claiming the Minister was too busy to read something written by a mudblood.

Now he sat in the outer office of the Minister and was slowly steaming. He had tried several times to get someone's attention to explain the Goblin position and no one wanted to listen to him. Last night he had talked with his wife long into the night and between them they had come to a decision. He was going to resign today. She had a cousin in Canada who could help them get set up there and they wouldn't have to deal with the pureblood nonsense that he dealt with everyday here.

Her cousin had been imploring her for years to leave Britain and they had refused to see reason until now. Their children were coming close to Hogwarts age and they didn't want them exposed to the bigotry and racism that was rampant throughout the school.

For three solid hours he had watched people parade in and out of the office while he sat waiting. Enough was enough! He opened his briefcase and withdrew some papers, then he stood and walked over to the secretary's desk.

"Might I borrow some parchment?" he asked.

She looked surprised that he'd even dare ask and handed him a few sheets. Dirk bent over the desk and plucked a quill from her hand. He quickly scribbled a note, which he then attached to the pile of paperwork. With a flourish, he tossed the quill back at the woman and held the bundle out to her. "Give this to the idiot inside and tell him I quit. I'm not working for an moron any longer. Tell him to get his own answers from the Goblins."

In his anger, he didn't realize he'd made a mistake. The papers he left with the secretary were not the report on the Goblins, but rather some notes on a book he was thinking of writing, and a list of things his wife wanted him to pick up on the way home from work today. The only copy of his report still remained in his briefcase under a pile of notes, doodles of a very toadish looking Undersecretary being eaten by storks that he'd drawn while sitting at his desk, waiting to be called by the Minister, and a list he'd compiled that morning of things he needed to remember to pack before leaving this wretched country.

With that, he straightened and walked from the office, stiff backed and proud to have finally broken free. Within the hour, Dirk had visited Gringotts and emptied his vault, then purchased four portkeys to Calgary. By this time tomorrow, he and his family would be gone from Britain.

Three hours after Cresswell left the outer office, Fudge left his office, preparing to go home for the evening. "I'm out of here for the night," he declared. "Did anything interesting happen today?"

The secretary looked up at her boss and shook her head. She wasn't about to tell him that the one person with any answers to the Goblins and Dragons left the building after quitting and calling him a moron.

Campbeltown Weyr, Scottish West Coast, January 14th...

Harry groaned and bent over. Captain Atkins had increased their run around the Weyr since Harry was no longer feeling the need to throw up at the end of each run. Now he simply felt miserable and promised himself he would wreak vengeance on Remus for suggesting he run with the Captain and her people every morning.

On the other hand, the effect on Harry was becoming noticeable. He was starting to fill out and gaining muscle mass. Not a lot, but it was noticeable.

The Captain had apologized to Harry for her comments to Sirius and they found themselves forming a unique sort of friendship. Harry saw a lot of things in Kathrine that he liked and admired, including the fact that she owned up to her mistakes and had apologized for them. He understood what she had been doing and also understood that she was working with incomplete information at the time.

For Katherine's part, she treated Harry as if he were a junior officer in need of guidance. It wasn't far from the mark, even if he carried authority far above any junior officer she had ever met. She was coming to like the shy teen who had been thrust into this unique position by chance, and she believed that, despite that chance, he was capable of handling his new role.

"You did good out there, Harry," Captain Atkins said with a grin. She wasn't even breathing hard. He looked at her sourly.

"You know you didn't have to take Remus at his word and run me into the ground," he replied.

She laughed and shook her hair out. "Be thankful. If you were a recruit you'd be off next to your hand to hand training."

He shook his head and sighed heavily. "Yes, and I'm sure someone will think I need that that as well, eventually."

"Harry."

He looked up at the woman. He admired her and liked her, but she intimidated him even more than McGonagall did.

"Hand to hand combat isn't a bad idea for you to learn," she told him quietly. "The only reason I haven't suggested it was that you weren't in shape for it. Besides, you have enough on your plate right now. A couple months from now I'll see about some simple lessons for you."

He nodded, "I know. Just another thing to add to the list."

Nearby, Momnarth bellowed aggressively and sprang into the air, flying directly towards the herd. Both turned to watch her swoop down and kill a good size cow.

Harry frowned as he watched her. She didn't stop to eat the beast. Instead it seemed almost as if she was lapping up the blood. As he watched, she spun quickly, reached out a paw and snagged another beast. Around her, males exited their Weyrs and watched her, thrumming loudly.

"What the devil?" exclaimed Atkins.

"Cheki?" asked Harry.

"She's blooding her kills, Harry. Soon she will rise to mate," Chekiath replied soothingly. "It was decided she would be the female from this Weyr to donate an egg to the next hatching. Many Weyrs will donate an egg so that we all help rebuild."

By now Momnarth was on her fourth kill and her color was darkening. Harry glanced over at Chekiath, who seemed unmoved by the drama.

"I am not yet ready to mate, Harry, and she is my egg mother. I would not rise to cover her even if I were ready. Her daughters would be safe for me, but never my egg mother."

He nodded. "She's getting ready to mate," he murmured to Atkins. "Chekiath says she's blooding her kills, then she'll rise to begin the mating flight."

Momnarth raised her head and looked over at the anxiously watching males. She stretched out her neck and bellowed her challenge. With a tremendous leap, she sprang aloft and flew away faster than Harry believed possible. The waiting males bellowed in response and sprang into the air.

"My god," whispered Atkins, "She's moving so fast! They all are!"

Harry nodded, surprised himself by her speed. He made a mental note to see if they could determine the top speed for a dragon in flight. He knew that Chekiath was faster than his firebolt, but Momnarth's speed awed even him.

He also noted that there were a number of large males chasing Momnarth and not all were Hungarian Horntails. "It looks like Sir Robert was right. We're seeing the different breeds attempting to mix again," he murmured.

High overhead he could barely make out the dot of Momnarth followed by a cluster of male dragons.

"If the other females ravage the herd like that, we're going to need a lot more animals," Atkins said softly.

Harry shook his head. "No. Once she's mated, she'll return and eat a few of those kills. Once she has, some of the yearlings and other dragons will take care of the rest. In a week, she'll lay her eggs. Apparently they mature much faster than the Pern standard, which took weeks before laying and even longer before hatching."

"When will the eggs hatch?" Atkins asked.

"Sometime around mid February, we think. That's why we want to get the potentials here at least ten days ahead of the hatching for some basic training," Harry replied.

He returned his gaze skyward and watched the spectacle. Both humans were awed by the flying skills of the large beings.

Granger Household in Crawley, January 14th...

"Smelly Dog, wake up! There are humans below that mean harm."

Sirius started from his nap and blinked for a second before reaching for his wand. The past week had been quiet and the Grangers had stayed close to home. There had been some talk of leaving the country, but selling a business like theirs wasn't something you

could do overnight, plus moving to another country could mean re-certifying as dentists, or giving up that line of work entirely.

"Move yourself to the back yard, Smelly Dog. There are three humans here for Fuzzy One and the Teeth Pullers."

Around them Sirius could feel the other dragons turning their attention to the Granger house. With a quick nod, he apparated to the yard behind the house and renewed his disillusionment charm.

Norendrath waited. He heard the front door being blown in and shouts from different parts of the house. The Fuzzy One screamed in pain and fear, before being forced to move in the direction of her parents. That was exactly what Norendrath was waiting for. The humans were now all clustered in one section of the house on the first floor.

Willing himself to his full weight and beyond, the large dragon stood on the roof for a moment, then that section of the roof collapsed under his weight.

"Shit!" exclaimed Sirius, then made a mad dash for the back door. The front of the house looked like it had been demolished. Banishing the door, he rushed in to find two very startled and terrified aurors staring at Norendrath, who growled menacingly at them. Hermione was on the floor, bleeding from a slashing curse that hit her in the arm and shoulder. Another auror was laying under a pile of rubble and bleeding almost as badly as Hermione was.

One of the aurors glanced towards Sirius and fainted.

"Its Sirius Black!" exclaimed the last auror. He backed away and activated a portkey, vanishing.

Norendrath growled again and then moved, causing more of the house to collapse. Part of the debris fell on the remaining unconscious auror.

"We don't have any time," Sirius declared. He pointed his wand at Hermione and a bandage spat from the tip, wrapping itself around her wound. Then he levitated her. "Come on, we have to get out of here before more aurors arrive."

Stunned, Dan and Emma followed Sirius as best as they could while still keeping an eye on the monster that had destroyed their home. Once out in the backyard, they skidded to a halt. Four other dragons were sitting silently waiting for them to come out.

"Dan," Emma gasped in fear.

"Do not be afraid," Norendrath said, then he pushed his way through a wall and out into the yard. The house groaned and what was left of it fell in on itself.

Sirius left Hermione floating while he turned to the house. "Accio jackets!"

A number of jackets pulled themselves from the wreckage and he took three of the heaviest. "Put these on," he said shoving a jacket at Dan and another at Emma. "Hurry," he hissed. "Put a jacket on and climb onto a dragon."

Dan blinked and rounded on the man. "Are you insane?"

"Do it. Do it now or I'll take Hermione and leave you here for the Aurors," Sirius said tensely.

"Dan, please," Emma said, pulling on a jacket, then she looked at the large Horntail that raised a leg to her. She bit back a whimper and climbed up the leg until she could straddle the shoulders.

Dan shook his head. "This is insane," he muttered, then he copied his wife's movements.

Sirius nodded to the two dragons and both sprang aloft and jumped Between. Sirius scrambled up on Norendrath and summoned Hermione to him. He wrapped her in her jacket and held on tight.

"Now, Norendrath!" he shouted.

The large longhorn leapt skyward to the sound of more wizards apparating in. Sirius laughed mockingly at the stunned aurors looking up at him, then Norendrath jumped Between and they were gone.

Campbeltown Weyr, Scottish West Coast, January 14th...

Harry and Katherine started to turn away from the mating flight when two dragons appeared overhead, bellowing in alarm. Both dragons quickly landed and Harry could see two people on their backs. He sprinted over and helped the woman climb down from the dragon. Katherine copied his example, helping the man.

The woman shook free from Harry and sprinted over to the man, who grabbed her and held her tightly. He started to walk over when the rest of Sirius' team of dragons appeared overhead. Norendrath bugled loudly in distress because he had a potential rider who was badly wounded.

"Chekiath!" yelled Harry.

Instantly his dragon appeared overhead and Harry ignored the blast of cold air while his dragon landed. "Can you speak to the Phoenix?"

"I will try, but it's a long way to talk, even with a firebird."

Harry's eyes rested on Hermione in Sirius' arms. She was pale and not moving. "Try please. Tell Fawkes that we need Madam Pomfrey here right away. It's an emergency."

Chekiath bobbed his head and turned away from Harry.

Harry raised a hand and gently lifted Hermione from Sirius' arms. He carefully floated her down to his level, while Katherine used a portable radio to call for a medic and a stretcher.

An alarm blared across the camp as the military police locked down the Weyr.

Harry floated Hermione in the direction of the Weyr infirmary, while Sirius gathered up her parents and got them moving, following Harry.

The infirmary wasn't much, just a simple aid station that the guard company had put together in an unused building. Before now, it had been used for dispensing aspirin and cold medicines, but little else.

Fawkes appeared with a very startled Madam Pomfrey just as Harry reached the door. Poppy found herself dropped gently to the ground, then the Phoenix vanished again.

Poppy spotted Harry, then the prone form he was levitating and immediately strode forward. "Is there a bed nearby you can place her on?"

He nodded and started towards the door again when it opened and the base medic stepped out carrying the stretcher.

The medic stopped and stared. Like all of the guard force, they had seen some examples of magic, but this was the first time he had seen it up close. "Let's get her inside," he said, holding the door open.

Fawkes reappeared with Dumbledore and Professor McGonagall. Both seemed alarmed by the fact that Fawkes had insisted they both come with him.

Harry floated Hermione over to a cot and gently laid her down, then he turned to Sirius. "What happened?"

Poppy pushed past him, wand already drawn. She had a patient and she wasn't about to let someone stand in her way.

"Three aurors attacked the Grangers. They apparated to just outside the front door and forced their way in before I could do anything. I'm sorry, Harry, but they caught me by surprise."

Harry looked at his godfather for a moment, then he nodded. "Fine. Let's get out of Madam Pomfrey's way."

"I'll stay with her in case she needs something, Harry," Remus added from the door.

"I'll stay also, Harry Potter sir," Dobby declared.

"Thank you Remus, Dobby," Harry replied, then he turned to the two professors. "Headmaster, Professor, I'm sorry this happened, but since we have to wait, can I interest you in a cup of tea?"

"I want to stay with my daughter," Emma said firmly.

Harry walked over to her and took one of her hands in his own. "Mrs Granger, our kitchen is nearby and Remus can come get us if we're

needed. Let's give Madam Pomfrey time to work her magic on Hermione. Madam Pomfrey is the best healer there is. If anyone can fix Hermione up, she's the one to do it. Staying here and worrying won't do much good. Besides, you look like you could use a good cup of hot tea."

"You're Harry Potter?" Dan Granger asked.

"Yes, sir, I am."

"This is all your fault!" he spat angrily. "You've been nothing but trouble for our daughter since she went to that blasted school."

Harry flinched as if struck and looked away.

"That's not fair," exclaimed Katherine angrily. She didn't know Harry very well yet, but she knew that the man was reacting out of fear for his daughter and the narrow escape they had just experienced. The problem was that Harry would still take the harsh words to heart.

Dan blinked and stared at the woman in surprise. He really hadn't expected anyone so - normal to defend boy. She was in her working uniform and she could be a commanding presence when she wanted to be.

"Harry didn't send the magical Ministry to your house, nor did he hurt your daughter. I know for a fact that he's had his godfather watching your house for weeks now because he was afraid something like this would happen."

"Perhaps this would be easier if we all sat down and talked like adults without throwing accusations back and forth," Albus said softly. He was pleased to see Harry had taken his warning about Hermione to heart, but he was also a bit alarmed at how her father's word seemed to hurt the lad. Harry was still emotionally fragile, even with the bonding.

"Harry you're unhappy. What's wrong? Did the Fuzzy One hurt you again?"

The Grangers looked around wildly, wondering where that voice came from.

"It's nothing, Cheki. Everything will work itself out, I'm sure," Harry said aloud, then he turned to the others. "If you'll follow me please?"

Dan started to say something when Emma grabbed his hand. He glanced at her and she shook her head at him. He sighed and nodded, then followed Harry and the others from the infirmary.

In the kitchen area Harry poured himself a cup with shaking hands and then looked at Sirius. "What happened?"

"Like I said, Harry, the aurors showed up and were inside the house before I could do anything. There were three of them. Norendrath told me to go down to the backyard while he positioned himself over a portion of the house that was empty before increasing his weight. He crashed through the roof and I broke down the back door. Hermione was already injured when I got there. One of the Aurors must of cut her up with a slicing hex.

"One of the aurors was injured when the house fell, another fainted, and the third fled, so I grabbed the Grangers and got out there. More aurors were just starting to arrive when I went between."

Harry gripped the cup tightly and the room started to rumble as his magic started to slip from his control. "Harry," Sirius said nervously.

"Harry, the Fuzzy One should be well soon. Please don't be angry." Chekiath said.

Fawkes flamed into the room and trilled a calming verse that had everyone relaxing again.

Harry bent his head and refused to look at anyone. Impressing Chekiath might have relieved Harry of the nearly suicidal levels of stress, but it had done nothing to help ease the pain of losing her help and support. Now, seeing her so pale and lifeless drove home the magnitude of what he could have lost. He felt overwhelmed.

Emma took in the scene and moved from Dan's side to sit next to Harry. "Hermione is so very sorry for what she did, Harry. She knows it was wrong and she knows she hurt you badly. She didn't mean for it to happen."

"Please don't be sad, Harry," Chekiath said. He was outside, peering in through a window, his eyes twirling with stress.

Emma lifted Harry's chin and grabbed a napkin from the table to wipe away the tears. "She's going to need her friend while she recovers."

"And you might want to think about this, Harry. It was your direct action which resulted in saving Miss Granger and her family. Without the help of your friends, a greater tragedy could have resulted this day," Albus added soft.

"Siri?" Harry whispered.

"Yeah, Harry?"

"Thank you. You too, Norendrath and your friends. Thank you for saving her and her family."

"Anytime, Harry. I owe both her and you my life."

"You are welcome, Weyrleader," Norendrath replied. His comment was echoed by the other four dragons in the group.

Dan Granger blinked and looked around. "All right, either I'm going nuts or suddenly I'm hearing voices in my head! What is going on?"

Albus glanced over at Harry, who nodded to him to go ahead.

"Dragons are intelligent, Mister Granger," Dumbledore told him. "They are as smart as you or I, but they cannot speak as we do. Therefore, they speak to each other and to us using their minds. What you hear inside your head is a dragon talking."

Dan sat heavily on a seat and shakily poured himself a drink. Dobby appeared a moment later and poured a small dram of whiskey into Dan's drink. He was so shocked by the idea of talking dragons that the elf adding a shot to his drink didn't even phase him.

"Mister Potter," Professor McGonagall said, "Where are we?"

Harry blinked and then smiled softly. "I'm sorry, Professors, I should have said something sooner. Welcome to Campbeltown Weyr,

formerly MoD Machrihanish. Her Majesty was gracious enough to loan us the use of this former Royal Air Base to house our dragons. Captain Katherine Atkins of the British Army is in charge of Weyr security. She basically keeps the muggles away. As to where we are, we are on the west coast of Scotland, not far from the Island of Arran. Normally there are a lot more people here from the British government, but Sir Robert wanted most of his people to attend a special meeting today."

Harry gestured to Captain Atkins. "Captain, I'd like you to meet Professor McGonagall and Headmaster Dumbledore of Hogwarts. Since you like compiling your lists, you might want to add their names, along with the Grangers to your lists," he said with a bit of a smirk. He teased her about her need to know who was "in the know" and who wasn't.

"So this is a government run military project?" Dan asked incredulously.

"Not quite, Mister Granger. What we have here is the equivalent of an intelligent alien life form," Captain Atkins said. "I'll grant you, no one expected to find aliens living among us, but when we realized what we were dealing with we made provisions to allow them some place to live."

"Once, man worked in close cooperation with the dragons, and they look to reestablish that connection. Harry, through no fault of his own, found himself in the unique position of being the first human they reached out to. And in doing so, they accepted him as their leader," Dumbledore added.

Dan rubbed his temples and frowned. "History wasn't my strongest subject, but I can't recall any period when we worked with another species, especially one so... different."

"Perhaps it would be best if we hold this conversation at another time. Madam Pomfrey and Remus are here, undoubtedly with news of Miss Granger," Albus said, interrupting the conversation.

Harry looked up sharply at Madam Pomfrey. "How is she," he blurted. It was a question burning on everyone's mind so no one minded his asking.

Remus led Madam Pomfrey to a table and poured her a cup of tea. "She's alive and resting comfortably now. Her recollection of how she got injured is spotty at best. But one thing was clear, one of the aurors mentioned that it appeared 'Snape's report' was correct."

Minerva sucked in a sharp breath and turned to Dumbledore. "Oh, Albus! Snape?" she exclaimed in dismay.

Dumbledore closed his eyes and bowed his head. "I was afraid he would be the one to report her missing from the school. Of all our staff, his voice has been the one single voice protesting the enforcing of the code of conduct."

Harry stood and gestured with one hand. His goggles and gloves appeared in front of him and a window opened. A moment later his heavy jacket flew through it. Around the building more than a dozen dragons trumpeted in approval at what they were feeling from the Weyrleader.

"Harry," Remus said carefully, "what are you planning?"

"Snape hurt Hermione. He has to pay." Harry replied, pulling on his jacket. It was just that simple. Snape had hurt his friend and Harry was going to punish him.

To everyone's alarm, dragons started gathering in the space next to the kitchen hall.

Remus stood then walked over to Harry and placed his hands on his shoulders. "You can't do this, Harry. You wouldn't let Sirius and I kill Pettigrew. You knew it was wrong. And you know this is wrong. The dragons would follow you, but do you really want them to violate their own beliefs over Snape? Hermione wouldn't want you to do this."

Harry looked up at him with huge eyes and his shoulders drooped.

"Harry," Albus added, "if its any consolation, Snape's tip resulted in an auror getting injured. There is a law on the books that will now result in Snape being brought in for questioning. Given his background and the fact that I no longer enjoy the political power that I once used to have, I doubt he will survive his dose of veritaserum without accruing extra charges against him."

Fawkes added his own contribution, trilling softly, causing the tensions to relax even further.

"Fine," Harry muttered, pulling off his jacket.

Outside the kitchen building the dragons began to disperse. Remus gently pushed Harry back into his seat and cast a spell, warming his drink before handing it back to Harry.

"Poppy, how much care will Miss Granger need?" asked Albus.

"She'll need some potions and should be watched for another day, but I don't need to be here. Her injuries were easily healed. Right now she just needs to recover from her blood loss. She'll be a little weak and should refrain from using magic for a day, but she's fine otherwise."

Dumbledore nodded and looked thoughtful. "Did she still have her wand on her?"

"Yes, it was in her pocket," Poppy replied in confusion, holding up a wand.

Dumbledore nodded and summoned the wand to him. He caught it in one hand and muttered under his breath, canceling the tracking charm. Harry nodded gratefully at him when the wand glowed pink for a moment. Dumbledore had done the same thing for him.

Albus stood and walked over to Harry and handed him Hermione's wand. "I think your friend will be glad to get this back, and even happier to get it from you. But now, I'm afraid Minerva, Poppy and I must return to the school. We cannot be absent for too long."

Harry nodded and pocketed the wand while Dumbledore gathered up the others. Then Fawkes leapt into the air and hovered over Albus, waving his tail feathers. "Ladies, if you would each grab a feather."

As soon as each of them had a feather in their hands Fawkes vanished in a ball of flame, taking them with him.

"Is it all right to leave Hermione alone?" asked Harry.

"She's not alone," Remus replied. "Corporal Stone is with her. Madam Pomfrey left some potion bottles behind with instructions for him. He also knows he can ask Dobby to alert Poppy should he run into trouble."

Harry looked unhappy with that answer, but there wasn't anything else he could do. "Dobby?"

Dobby appeared with a small pop. "Yes, Harry Potter sir?"

Harry smiled at his friend. Dobby's antics made him laugh. "Would you prepare cabin number five for the Grangers? Tomorrow we'll make arrangements for them to get clothing and other items but for tonight they need a place to sleep."

"Dobby will take care of everything!" he announced, then he vanished with another pop.

Harry pushed his drink away and stood. He picked up his jacket and headed for the door. Sirius and Remus watched him worriedly as he left. He looked emotionally wiped out.

Harry walked back to his own Weyr and pitched his jacket onto a chair in the corner. Chekiath raised his head and watched Harry carefully as he stripped down. It was late and he felt tired beyond belief. Looking between his bed and Chekiath he made a decision. He walked over and pulled the comforter off the bed, then he walked over to Chekiath's area and laid down next to his dragon. Chekiath rumbled comfortingly and curled around Harry protectively.

Back in the kitchen, Remus turned to Sirius with an unhappy expression. "I'm worried. He took it rather hard."

"Excuse me, but what is wrong with Harry?" Emma asked, "Hermione never mentioned him being so emotional or fragile before. Then suddenly this year, what he tried to do devastated Hermione."

Sirius sighed and nodded to Remus. He could explain it better than he could. Remus smiled grimly and turned to the others. "Harry has had to put up with an awful lot. Albus Dumbledore freely admits he made a lot of mistakes in regard to Harry, but his greatest mistake was placing Harry in a home where he wasn't wanted and wasn't

loved. It's obvious now that the one lesson he learned best at that home was to hide what he was feeling. No one really knew how much trouble he was in until he walked into that arena, intent on letting the dragon kill him.

"Each year at Hogwarts he found himself risking his life to help the school or his friends and most times it wasn't appreciated, or even acknowledged when it was over."

Remus paused and Sirius took over. "This year was the worst. The whole school turned on him and openly mocked him without fear of punishment from any teacher. In previous years he always had Hermione to rely on when they turned on him, but this year she withdrew her support. He was alone and saw the tournament and its bloody history as a way of reuniting himself with his parents."

Sirius looked intently at the Grangers. "I won't say that her actions forced his hand at the tournament, but they certainly didn't help matters. Harry didn't have any friends while growing up, so when he went to Hogwarts and met Hermione and Ron, he treasured their friendship more than would be normal for a teen his age. Ron's fight with Harry was vicious enough to have him basically give up on that friendship. It was a dumb reason to fight and he tried to avoid it, but Ron didn't let it go.

"Hermione's actions," Sirius paused and shrugged. "I owe her my life, but I also recognize that, like Harry, she's young and made a mistake. Unfortunately it came at a time when he needed her the most. I know how it's affected her and I firmly believe Harry will forgive her for it. But he's still fragile. It's a condition I can understand well, which is why I didn't press him to send a note to Hermione until Dumbledore sent that warning."

"Chekiath helps him a lot, Siri," Remus said into the silence.

Sirius smiled, "He does. I envy what he has and I can't tell you how grateful I am to that little dragon. He saved Harry that day and he continues to help him every day."

"Now that's something I don't understand. What is so important about the dragons?" asked Dan.

"Harry has impressed Chekiath, Mister Granger," Katherine said. "I didn't understand what it meant until I came here and saw it for myself."

The dentists looked at her in confusion. They clearly didn't understand what it meant.

"Let me, Captain," Remus said, then he turned to the Grangers. "What I'm about to tell you is a state secret, but you would have learned it anyway. The dragons were created by man in a time far into our future. An accident resulted in one queen dragon traveling into our distant past where she laid her eggs and helped those dragons survive. The dragons were designed to help fight a terrible enemy and they relied on a human rider. Between the dragon/rider pair there existed a unique mental connection which enabled the pair to talk to each other mentally.

"Rarely a human would be born that could talk to any dragon, anywhere. Harry is one such person. Now imagine a boy who grew up in a house where he was hated and loathed suddenly finding himself confronted with a being who loves him above all others, unconditionally.

"Harry is dedicated to Chekiath and the other dragons and Chekiath is totally dedicated to Harry. It's unlike any kind of bond we know of. Its so strong that in the instant of his impression to Chekiath his desire to die was thrown away."

He stopped and took a sip from his cup. "Think about it," he said softly. "To suddenly know you have someone who loves you above all else. That's Harry."

"The dragons are showing abilities that would make them important commercial partners," Katherine added, "But more to the point, we recognize they are thinking beings, just like you and I. We have laws that say people are to be treated equally in this country. Dragons might not be human, but they are intelligent beings, no different than some alien that stepped off a spaceship.

"The magical governments of the world consider them beasts, no better than cows or sheep. That is morally wrong on so many levels that, when Harry asked for our help, we were happy to give it. Its the only right and proper thing to do."

Dan nodded slowly. "I think I see the points you're making," he admitted, then he sighed. "I owe that young man an apology."

"We both do," Emma murmured. Dan shot her an appreciative look but he knew better.

"You'll have plenty of opportunity to give that apology, I'm afraid," Sirius said. "We saved you tonight but destroyed your house in the process. Even if we hadn't destroyed the house, you're now fugitives from the Magical Law Enforcement. Plus there's Hermione to consider."

"Nothing need be decided tonight," Katherine said. She knew this was going to be another touchy conversation and the Grangers had enough shocks for one night. "Why don't we get some sleep and deal with this and other issues tomorrow?"

Headmaster's Office, January 15th...

Albus Dumbledore sipped his morning tea while he waited. He had offered his guests some tea, but they all declined. He hadn't been surprised to find these particular guests waiting for him when he awoke.

It had been a restless night for him, filled with much introspection and he had regretfully come to a number of unhappy conclusions. Some of those conclusions resulted in him stealing down to the staff quarters and removing some damning memories that would not help anyone if they became known.

As loathe as he was to admit it, there were certain actions that the Order had taken during the first war that would not show them in the very best light. So he had selectively removed those memories from Snape while he slept.

Once he returned to his quarters it struck him just how badly he had failed his people. He knew about Harry, but he had asked his people to break the law on several occasions with no real concern for their well being should they be caught. It was a sobering and heart breaking realization for the old man.

"Amelia?"

Amelia Bones looked up from the parchments she clutched in her hands. Two of her aurors had been injured yesterday and she was rather unhappy about it. Sirius Black had been spotted, and dragons, which confirmed some people's suspicion about Miss Granger.

"Yes, Headmaster?"

"Far be it for me to tell you how to do your job, but I would think it would be most interesting if you also asked Severus about some of his potion experiments."

Amelia turned and gave him a piercing look. "What are you suggesting?"

Dumbledore looked pained. "Amelia, let's be realistic here. Yes, I was crucial to getting Snape out of trouble one time. Since then, I have come to suspect a few things but was never able to prove anything. And Snape is not without other supporters. Lucius is a good friend of his and he is godfather to Lucius' son. There were several incidents through the years that Lucius blocked anyone investigating. He can't stop you now and frankly I'm curious to have some answers."

Amelia stared at him for a moment longer, then nodded. She had heard enough stories from Susan over the years to fully believe the man was capable of anything. On the other hand, she didn't fully trust Dumbledore either. She wasn't sure what his game was, but he was sending her a clear message. Dumbledore would no longer provide protection for Severus Snape.

The door opened and Snape entered. He stopped short when he noticed Amelia and two aurors.

"Ah, Severus," Dumbledore said jovially. "Excellent! These aurors would like to ask you some questions. I'll cover your classes for today so don't worry about that."

Snape paled and looked at the old man in shock. "Sir?" he asked, his voice held a bit of a tremble now. He couldn't believe the old man was cutting him loose!

"Severus Snape," Amelia said formally. "Due to a tip you sent our office, two of my aurors suffered severe injuries. Under DMLE Criminal Code 128c subsection 8, you are ordered to submit to veritaserum questioning concerning your role in the near fatal action of 15 January."

"This is preposterous! You can't be serious!" Snape exclaimed angrily.

One of the aurors stepped up to Snape while the other covered him with his wand. "Your wand, sir," the auror demanded.

Snape whirled away from the man and faced Dumbledore. "Headmaster, surely you're not going to allow this farce to continue?"

Albus sighed heavily and wiped at his eyes. "Severus, out of sheer spite you sent a tip to the DMLE which resulted in two men getting injured. While I can understand wanting to help the DMLE, I know for a fact that you sent that tip because it would hurt Mister Potter and Miss Granger. You didn't do it out of any civic duty or a need to help the greater good, you did it out of spite and people got hurt. No, I'm quite afraid that we must follow the law here."

"Your wand, sir," repeated the auror.

Snape shot Dumbledore a venomous look, then he sneered at the auror. The man lost his patience and pushed Snape up against the wall, pulling his arm behind his back and up. Snape screamed in pain and the other auror rushed forward to help his companion. The first auror held Snape pinned against the wall while the second frisked him, removing several unmarked vials of potions as well as two wands.

Amelia examined the vials, and uncorked one. Taking a sniff she arched an eyebrow and offered it to Albus who took a sniff, then he blanched.

"It's a memory loss potion, related to a liquid obliviate," he muttered, "But not quite the same."

"No matter," Amelia replied, taking back the vial and sealing it. "Our boys will figure it out."

"I can explain," Snape protested.

"And you will, after you've been dosed with our enhanced veritaserum." Amelia replied calmly.

Snape paled even further. The Ministry was well aware of the problems of Potions Masters working on ways to negate the effects of veritaserum, so they had a special formula which they kept secret. So far, no one had managed to negate its effect. "In fact, I think we'll have a lot to talk about, Severus Snape, like why you're carrying a second, unregistered wand, or why you have what appears to be a banned potion in your pocket."

The aurors placed manacles on his wrists and activated them. They were enchanted to clamp down hard on his magical core and prevent any magic from being cast either accidentally or deliberately.

"Gentleman, escort our guest to our offices and make him comfortable in Room twenty two. I will be along in a few minutes and we can begin our conversation then."

Snape gave Dumbledore a pleading look, but the old man's attention was elsewhere. He struggled for a moment longer before going limp. He was trapped and the old man wasn't going to help him this time.

Amelia waited until they had dragged Snape through the floo before turning back to Dumbledore. "Just what is your game Dumbledore?" she demanded.

Albus looked pained. "Call it an act of contrition, Amelia. For a number of years I have blindly allowed too many things to happen under my own nose. Severus' problems were of his own making and encouraged by my lack of reaction to what he was doing."

Albus smiled ruefully. "I am trying to correct excesses which have gone on far too long in this school. I'm an old man, Amelia, and I've made a great many mistakes along the way. For my own peace of mind, I intend to correct what I can in the time I have remaining."

Amelia stared at him for a moment, then she nodded to herself. "All right. Now, what do you know about dragons? There were dragons present at the Grangers and this crisis is ruining our economy."

Albus pinned her with his gaze. "Tell me, Amelia, why don't we use Wizard Heartstrings in wands? We could easily hunt down French Wizards for the strings. I'm sure they would also provide excellent potion ingredients."

Amelia recoiled in shock. "They're human! That's murder."

"Perhaps, but then killing a creature that thinks, knows of itself, even loves, is no different than killing that French Wizard. I fear that if we cannot learn that lesson, then our economy deserves to collapse. A very smart muggle once said a little revolution now and then is a good thing. It promotes change. Perhaps it's our time for some changes to be forced upon us," Albus replied.

Amelia stood and looked at the elder wizard uneasily. "I disagree. I think you're getting too old for your positions, Albus. Think about retiring before someone forces you to do so!"

She turned and exited via the floo.

Albus sighed and went back to reading his morning mail. He had tried to reach the most honest person he knew of still in power at the Ministry and she had rejected him.

Campbeltown Weyr, Scottish West Coast, January 15th...

Harry looked at the wand laying on his desk for the fortieth time that morning. It wasn't that he didn't have a problem with the wand, but it represented something he was very reluctant to do -confront Hermione.

"Maybe I can find her mother and give it to her," he muttered.

"You can't," Chekiath said. "The Captain took the Teeth Pullers to the big hold for new hides and skins."

Harry grimaced. The dragons were big on tradition and they knew the modern name for clothing. Despite that, they insisted on calling it what their ancestors called it. As for the Grangers, Chekiath's comment meant that the Grangers weren't on the base. That left Harry to bring Hermione her wand.

"I could wait til they get back," He said to Chekiath.

His dragon turned and eyed him, his eyes twirling with a slight green tint to them. Chekiath was finding Harry's reluctance amusing.

"Your not afraid of the Fuzzy One, are you?"

Harry scowled. "I'm not afraid of Hermione," he said tensely. He could feel Chekiath's rumble with laughter and several other dragons echoed his amusement.

"That's good to hear," Remus said from the door, "because she's awake and asking to see you."

Harry looked up and groaned. "Not you, too?" he said.

Remus smirked at him. "What's the problem, Harry? Hermione's not going to bite you."

Harry looked at him sourly. "Fine," he said, then he snatched up the wand and walked from the room.

"He really doesn't want to talk to her," Chekiath said sadly. "I think he is afraid she'll hurt him again."

Remus grimaced but he agreed with the little dragon. "He needs this, Cheki," he said softly. "He needs to talk to her. They both need it."

Chekiath bobbed his head and turned in the direction his rider went. He hoped Harry and the Fuzzy One would make some peace. It bothered him that one person could so upset his rider.

Harry stepped into the infirmary and nodded to Corporal Stone, who sat at a desk reading a magazine. Stone looked up and smiled, then waved Harry towards the lone filled bed. He nodded and took a deep breath before approaching the bed.

Hermione was turned on her side, looking away so she didn't see him until she heard someone sit down on the bed across from her.

She turned and spotted Harry. Her expression shifted from surprise to a huge smile in an instant. "Harry," she said softly. "I hoped I'd see you."

Harry's mouth opened and closed a few times as he tried to find something to say, then he finally went with something safe. "I've brought you your wand. Dumbledore took the tracking charm off it so you can cast magic with it."

He held out the wand and her expression fell. She reached for the wand reluctantly and took it with a timid smile of thanks. She looked at her friend and was able to see what her mum had been talking about during their conversations. Harry had an unnatural tenseness about him, but other than that it was like he was wearing a mask of bland emotion. Whatever he was feeling, he was burying it so deeply that she was sure he wasn't feeling it consciously.

Her eyes filled with tears and she tossed her wand onto the nightstand before turning back to Harry. "I've hurt you so badly," she said sadly. "I'm so sorry, Harry. I never knew how much you were hurting."

He turned away from her. Her words were like shells blasting through the emotional armor he had spent years building. "It's fine, Hermione," he muttered.

"No, it isn't," she countered hotly, then she sat up and swung her feet onto the floor so that she was facing him, separated only by the space between the beds. "It isn't all right, Harry, it isn't fine. Ron was making a mess of things and hurting both of us. I made a stupid mistake. Instead of stomping on Ron, I decided you wouldn't hurt me if I pushed you away. I hurt the wrong person instead of standing up to Ron. After... after you left, I couldn't believe what I had done, how I hurt you."

She choked back a sob of her own. Harry was watching her with wide tear filled eyes. He sat struggling with the emotions she was churning to the forefront and losing his battle to control them.

She reached for his hand. He tried to look away, but he couldn't. "I'm so sorry, Harry. I never meant to hurt you like I did. If you'll let me, I promise I'll try very hard not to hurt you like that again."

Afraid to utter a single word, he nodded and she leapt at him, wrapping him in her arms. He slowly lifted his arms and returned her embrace.

"YAY!"

Harry bit back a groan.

"You need her, Harry. Even I knew you were terrified she'd hurt you again," replied Chekiath.

"Cheki!" Harry hissed, then he leaned back enough to see Hermione looking a bit wild eyed.

"What was that?" She asked.

"That was me," Chekiath replied happily. "I was afraid you'd be mean to Harry again. I'm glad you're friends. Now Harry will stop worrying so much."

Hermione turned wide eyes on Harry. "Harry?" she whispered.

He sighed and shook his head. "That was Chekiath, my dragon. I think that privacy must be a concept he doesn't understand."

"At least this time I didn't tell you it was all right to mate with the girl, Harry. I'm learning! But if you want to mate with her, it would still be all right with me."

Harry groaned again and shook his head. "Cheki, please?" he pleaded.

Hermione flushed bright red and suddenly realized she was hugging a boy while wearing only the thinnest of pajamas. She released Harry and jumped back, nearly tripping over her bed and sat down with a thump.

At that moment a dragon passed by the window and she paled even further. The building trembled slightly with each step. Harry had noted before that sometimes dragons could be very heavy footed when they were deep in a conversation with someone. Apparently this dragon was more interested in his conversation than he was in controlling his weight.

"Harry, what's going on?"

He frowned. That conversation was going to take a lot of time and this was no place to hold it. He glanced over at Corporal Stone. "Corporal, is your patient confined to her bed and the infirmary?"

Stone looked up from his magazine, "No, sir. If she comes back at four for her medicine, it'll be fine, Mrs. Pomfrey didn't say anything about being confined to her bed. All she said was she was to relax and take it easy today."

Harry nodded and turned back to Hermione, who now had even more questions for him. "I'm afraid we only have the clothing you arrived in, but Dobby cleaned and repaired them last night. You can change in the bathroom," he said pointing toward a door. "Once you're ready, we can go somewhere more comfortable and get you some answers."

She nodded and scooped up her clothing from yesterday, then went into the bathroom to change.

Two hours later, Harry reached for his cup of tea while he watched Hermione process the story of dragons. Her eyes kept darting towards Chekiath, who had watched the entire process of Harry explaining to Hermione with amusement.

"You still haven't told me everything, have you?" she asked pointedly.

"Well, no, I haven't," he admitted. "There was a lot for you to take in. I wasn't sure if you'd be overwhelmed."

She tore her gaze from Chekiath and eyed him carefully. "What aren't you telling me?"

Harry shrugged, "Well, there is a chance, but only a chance mind you, that you could bond with a dragon. The dragons say you have the potential to be a rider, but some have expressed concerns."

"You are afraid of flying, Fuzzy One," Chekiath said.

Hermione frowned. She hated being reminded about her hair and the dragons had given her a name that did just that. Harry had gently explained that all non-riders got nick names instead of their real name. The dragons would call Hagrid by his name, but never a

non-rider. He also told her that all the explanations in the world wouldn't get the dragons to change a nick name. He said Sirius had spent weeks before giving up and accepting Smelly Dog.

"A dragon would never let their rider fall. Even one wounded to the very brink of death would jump Between to get down to the ground, if necessary. If you would be a rider, you cannot fear flying."

Harry nodded in agreement. "Learning to fly on your dragon is one of the easier things a rider has to learn and do. We're expecting a hatching next month and the potentials to arrive around the end of this month. If you want to be presented as a potential rider, you'll have until the hatching to conquer your fear."

Hermione sat motionless while she thought furiously for a moment, then she looked up at Harry. "Can I try flying on a dragon before then?"

Harry smiled at her. "Not today you can't." He declared with a grin, "I don't want Madam Pomfrey coming after me. If I know her she probably wouldn't even approve of you being out of bed."

She frowned and shook her head. "This is a lot to take in," she muttered.

Harry chuckled darkly. "You've got it easy. You may or may not become a rider. I have an entire planet's worth of dragons that are looking to me for help and protection. Why else would I get the muggles involved? I can't stand against the wizarding world alone, and I know they will never leave the dragons alone. Sooner or later, it's going to come to war between us."

Hermione nodded slowly. She was no fan of the wizarding world either. She and her parents both were now wanted fugitives from their Magical Law Enforcement.

"I'll help where I can, Harry," she said softly.

"Will you mate with him? You both like each other. I think it would do you both some good!" Chekiath offered helpfully.

Harry groaned and buried his head in his hands. "Cheki!" he whined.

"Harry, something is wrong! She's turning very red!" Chekiath exclaimed. "Is that the mating color for humans?"

Harry looked up to see Hermione blushing furiously and he started laughing uproariously.

Slowly Hermione started to laugh weakly, but she eyed the little dragon with suspicion. He couldn't possibly be that dense or that tactless. Her only conclusion was that dragons had their diplomacy gene removed when they were designed.

Wizengamot Chambers, January 16th...

"We will now hear from the Minister to find out what he learned when the Ministry confronted the Goblins concerning their continued use of dragons," Tiberius Ogden announced.

Fudge looked up in surprise. He had forgotten about that. Standing, he nervously shuffled some papers. "Well, you see... We, ah... Oh, yes, I remember now. I ordered our Goblin Liaison Wizard to speak with them. Madam Umbridge, summon that wizard to the Wizengamot Chambers to deliver his report."

Umbridge looked up and her expression changed to one of fright. "Minister, the wizard in question was a mudblood. I followed your policy of piling enough on the man to force him to quit."

Fudge stared at his Undersecretary for a moment, then huffed to himself. Sometimes she was just too efficient for his tastes. Now he'd have to find a wizard that would take that job and no respectable pure blood wanted it.

"Very well, Delores, if you would be so kind as to read from his report?" Cornelius replied smugly.

Delores blanched, then she grabbed a parchment from in front of her. "Sir, the report is rather poorly written and quite a tedious read. But if I may summarize?"

Fudge glanced up at Ogden, who had been watching the pair with an unhappy expression. Ogden nodded to Fudge, who turned back to Umbridge. "But of course, Madam Umbridge. Far be it for us to waste the valuable time of the Wizengamot," he said pompously.

Delores nodded and swallowed nervously, then she glanced down at the report concerning the matter of Bagman Vs The Ministry and pretended to read for a moment. "The goblins refused to answer any questions concerning dragons," she said hesitantly. "If I read this rightly, they threatened our Liaison wizard and kicked him out of their building in Diagon Alley."

She glanced up and was shocked to see Cornelius looking outraged. She had been working for years to turn the Ministry against the goblins, but she never expected a simple tale like this one to work in her favor. Humans weren't meant to mix with inferior species in her opinion.

A noisy murmur ran through the chamber and Ogden banged his gavel several times before it settled down. "My lords and ladies, it seems that on top of the current crisis concerning dragons, we now have another possible crisis concerning goblins," he said. "I realize, Minister, that this comes as a bit of a shock to you, but I would ask that you explain what your position concerning the goblins is."

Fudge looked around nervously. To be truthful, he had no clue what to do at the moment. "Chief Warlock, I would like to take time to confer with my department heads. But one thing seems obvious to me. If the goblins have dragons, perhaps any action taken against goblins could also result in our acquiring those dragons for ourselves."

A murmur of approval rippled through the chamber and Fudge smiled. Yes, the goblins had dragons and threatened us. This might resolve both problems at the same time.

"Very well, the Wizengamot will meet February 1st to discuss Ministry plans to deal with the Goblins and the dragons," Ogden announced. He leaned back in his chair and stared at Fudge in dismay. The man was totally ineffectual! He had allied himself with Fudge because he thought that it was Dumbledore that was causing most of their problems. Now he wasn't sure that was true at all.

Tiberius Ogden glanced around. "Does anyone have any new business to bring up before we restart the debate on the muggle tax increase?"

Augusta Longbottom stood and Ogden nodded to her. "Lady Longbottom? You have new business?"

"Chief Warlock, I seek clarification from the Minister," she declared.

Fudge looked up warily. He thought he had managed to escape this meeting unscathed, but now he wasn't sure.

"In regards to what, Lady Longbottom?" asked Ogden.

Augusta unrolled a newspaper and Cornelius bit back a moan. "My lords and ladies, this morning, as usual, I received a copy of the Boston Daily Cauldron. I get the weekly edition so that I might keep up on our investments overseas.

"Imagine my surprise when I found myself reading the detailed confession of one Peter Pettigrew and the announcement from the American DMLE that they had informed Minister Fudge nearly a month ago that he was in their custody.

"You will recall that around Yule our Ministry denied there was any possibility of Pettigrew being alive and the reports of his captured was merely a case of mistaken identity. And yet the photo is clearly of Pettigrew, whom I met on several occasions, as he was a known friend to my son and his wife."

Ogden's expression grew sour and he turned to Minister Fudge. "Minister, you have heard the Lady Longbottom. Have you a response for her?"

Fudge stood a bit reluctantly. "We believe that the Americans are making these outlandish statements in an attempt to discredit us. When we demanded that the wizard they claim to be Pettigrew be turned over to us, as he is a British Wizard, they refused outright, claiming they would try him in their own courts.

"Personally, I find it hard to believe that an Order of Merlin holder could be guilty of the crimes they claim and I still have doubts that the person they claim to be Pettigrew really is Pettigrew."

"So you have no intention to do anything?" asked an incredulous Madam Longbottom.

Fudge smirked back at her. "Is the dowager Lady Longbottom suggesting we invade America?"

"Of course I'm not suggesting it," she snapped. "But they are making us look bad in the eyes of the world and your inaction is lending credence to their claims!"

Fudge shrugged. This was one time even his advisers had failed him. "I am open to suggestions, Madam, but the simple fact is, the world will believe what it wants. We control most of what is seen by our citizens, but this is an enemy we cannot win against."

Ogden banged his gavel several times, catching their attention. "I will propose that the Wizengamot form a committee to look into dealing with this issue. The Ministry has far more important issues to deal with at the moment."

Fudge nodded eagerly and Augusta waved a hand in disgust. She wasn't interested in a protracted fight with the Minister.

Campbeltown Weyr, Scottish West Coast, January 17th...

Surprisingly, the Grangers settled into their cabin with few problems and even when they learned that Hermione might be suitable to be a rider they seemed to have little problem with the idea. Remus thought that a good deal of their acceptance came from the fact that they were currently living at the Weyr and wouldn't be apart from their daughter, even if she impressed.

Despite her rocky start, Hermione had an intense interest in the dragons and their history. When Spath shared her memories of Sidraneth's leap, she wept for Fara, who had been cut down so cruelly.

Hermione now sat in the Kitchen Hall. Harry's notes on dragon care were next to her and she was diligently transcribing them into her own notebook.

"I don't like what you did," a voice said harshly.

Surprised, she looked up. Standing across from her was a buxom blonde girl about her own age, although her accent was clearly Scottish.

"I'm sorry?"

"What you did to Harry. You nearly killed him!" spat May. She had arrived this weekend for her lessons with Hagrid and had been surprised to discover Hermione and her parents were living at the Weir.

Hermione was shocked at the vehemence in the girl's voice, but she still felt quite a lot of guilt from what she had done. "I wasn't too pleased with myself either, once I realized what I had done," Hermione admitted.

May blinked and looked taken aback by the comment.

Hermione motioned for May to sit down across from her.

"Not a thing you can say will make me feel any worse that I already do. Harry is my best friend and I didn't see what I was doing wrong. He and I have talked about it and he says he's forgiven me. If only it were that simple. He might have forgiven me but I have yet to forgive myself for what I did."

May sat and looked unhappy with herself. "I'm sorry, it's just that Harry brought dragons and magic into my life. I'm happy that he did, but I would have preferred it happened in an easier way for him."

"It wasn't my best decision," admitted Hermione, then she shrugged. "But then little of the first term was good for either of us."

"So, it's true then? The cops of your Ministry came for you?" asked May.

Hermione nodded unhappily. "And my parents. Our house was destroyed trying to stop them. And now my parents can't even go back to their jobs."

May scowled. "I don't understand how there can be two Ministries. Aren't we all British? Shouldn't your Ministry answer to the Queen or the Prime Minister?"

"I'm not really sure. Our history professor never got into the history of the Ministry. All he ever talked about was the goblin rebellions,"

Hermione replied uneasily, May was asking some important questions that she didn't have an answer to.

May nodded, then reached across the table. "I'm May. May McNulty. My Grandda and Da work for Lord Mills. That's how I met Harry and learned about the dragons. And just as a warning. If I hear about you hurting Harry again, I'll thump you myself."

Hermione shook the other girl's hand. "Hermione Granger," she said with a weak smile.

"Harry's had a lot of good things to say about you," May said softly. "Even when he was angry with you, he still thought you were the best person he knew. To be honest, after I learned what had happened to him, I decided that I had to hate you. But I couldn't. I'm not the best judge of people but I realized that if Harry thought you were so great, there had to be a real reason for it.

"I even asked him if you were his girlfriend," May admitted.

Hermione looked startled at the idea, then she smiled to herself. "If I know Harry, he stumbled through an answer for that question."

"Pretty much so, but I've come to discover that he's really shy around girls, unless he considers them a friend."

Hermione reached for her tea, then grimaced when she felt the cold cup. She picked up her wand and with a whispered incantation she heated the cup then took a sip. "Harry Potter in my world is famous. He's known world wide as the Boy-Who-Lived. At school he could have had his pick of dozens of girls and they would have been eager to please him."

She sipped again and frowned. "I didn't realize it at the time, but my mum pointed out that his reaction to those girls and just how he reacted in general to people suggested that his home life wasn't the best. I do love him but I know he'd be totally frightened by the idea. And honestly, if he's more comfortable with me being his friend, then that will have to do until he figures out what he wants."

May sighed. "He is rather clueless, isn't he? I kept expecting him to try something with me, but he never did. He's not like any other boy I've known and that makes him even more attractive."

Hermione eyed the blond with a bit of envy. She had an hourglass figure and she knew most teen boys zeroed in on a girl's bust. May had a bust that begged to be zeroed in on!

"I'm not sure I can offer any advice. He's a hard person to reach and now I understand he's even better at hiding his feelings than I thought. Besides, I can honestly say I wouldn't be unhappy if I found he had an interest in me. The only thing I can say for sure is to be a friend first and foremost. Anything else will have to be initiated by him. If you try to push him along, he'll only push back."

May looked at the girl across from her and understood that, in a way, they were both in a gentle competition for the same boy, but because of his upbringing, they could be friends. In fact, they would have to be friends. Harry wouldn't stand for them to be at each others throats. May envied Hermione her creamy complexion and her svelte figure. Hermione had a less pronounced bust than she did, but on her frame it looked better. May disliked her large bust and felt it attracted unwanted attention to her.

Nodding to herself, she smiled at Hermione. "So, what's it like to be a witch, then?"

Hermione smiled in return. She was smart enough to understand what May was trying to do. Harry would not want them fighting, so she was reaching out to Hermione, trying to find common ground to build a friendship on.

"Being a witch isn't all that different from being normal, I guess. For me, it was a relief actually. Before I learned I was a witch, my parents were terrified that there was something wrong with me. I underwent a lot of medical tests that turned out to be unnecessary," Hermione replied. "I don't blame my parents. They were scared and so was I. We didn't learn I was a witch until I was eleven years old."

"The wizarding world is terribly backward compared to the normal one, May. Magic is incredible, but the wizarding world is about a hundred years behind the muggle world. Hogwarts is lit by magical torches and candles. They fly brooms right out of a Halloween story and forget about more modern inventions. A wizard wouldn't know what the internet is. As it is, I barely know what it is either. My schooling has been primarily magical for the past four years."

"Well, that's going to change," May said with a bit of a smile. "I know Uncle James has been working on bringing in people to help Harry and the other potential riders that need schooling still."

"Uncle James?"

May colored slightly. "I mean Lord Mills. My family has worked for his family for five generations now. I grew up thinking of him as Uncle instead of Da's employer. I was even planning on going to University to become a veterinarian so I could help with his flocks."

May looked over at the witch and grinned. "I've been told that Uncle James is even planning on bringing in people to help get you wizards up to where you should be. GCSE's are only a year away. Remus has been handling Harry's magical training, with some help from Sirius, so I don't think there will be any problem there. I've been tutoring Harry on his math. He's rather good at it. And as long as I stick strictly to math, he's fine. But the one time I touched his back and complimented him, I thought he was going to die of embarrassment."

Hermione nodded. She was familiar with Harry doing that. She had always assumed he was just naturally shy.

May glanced at her watch, then stood. "Hagrid is going to start inspection soon. Why don't you tag along and learn how we do it? You're going to need to learn this if you hope to be a rider."

Hermione glanced down at the pile of notes, then she nodded. A quick wave of her wand saw the notes and her notebook put away in her book bag. She suddenly felt a lot better. Sure, she and May may have a little competition between them, but she knew it wouldn't stand in the way of a friendship.

Office of the Minister, Minister of Magic, London, January 18th...

Cornelius Fudge watched as his department heads filed into the office. Normally it would be crowded but earlier in the day an unspeakable had come up to expand the room for this special meeting.

He waited for everyone to get settled before he stood and hitched his thumbs in his vest. "The Wizengamot has asked us to formulate a plan in which we can take control of the Gringotts dragons. Now what I want to know from each of you is how we can accomplish that."

He looked up expectantly and was shocked to see visible fear on the faces looking back at him.

"Sir," Amelia Bones said slowly and carefully, "I was not present at the last meeting, but are you telling me that the Wizengamot expects us to attack Gringotts?"

"Is there a problem, Amelia?" asked Delores Umbridge. Several winced at her sickeningly sweet tone.

"Yes, there is," Amelia said, turning to Umbridge. "I am curious when our illustrious Wizengamot mastered mathematical magic."

Umbridge frowned at Amelia, not liking her tone at all. "I'm not sure I am familiar with that art, but I have no doubt that the Wizengamot has several members that are masters of it."

She trailed off as several people started to snicker at her and her frown turned into a scowl.

"Madam Umbridge," Amelia said frostily, "it boils down to simple numbers. Thanks to continuous budget cuts over the past decade, the auror force has shrunk to a total of just fifty full time aurors for all of Britain. Add the fifteen reservists and the five retirees we can reactivate and you have a total of seventy people."

Amelia turned to Alejandro Croaker, the head of the Department of Mysteries. "Alejandro, at the last census, how many Goblins lived in Britain?"

He reached into a bag and pulled out what was commonly called the Book of Answers. No one knew how it worked, but it always had the information that they asked of it. If the Department of Mysteries ever worked on a topic, it was written about in the book.

"As of the 1901 census, there were a total of just over 300,000 Goblins living in the United Kingdom. By comparison, during the same time frame, there were approximately 87,000 wizards in the U.K. When we surrendered at the end of the last rebellion, we estimated they had 50,000 goblins in their army."

"WHAT!" screeched Umbridge. "We never surrendered to those animals! We are superior to them in every way."

"On the contrary, madam," Croaker countered calmly, "of the twenty three recorded goblin rebellions, we lost all of them. The Ministry made it a policy in 1898 to teach the public that we won those wars when the truth is much different. The truth is, wizards have never won a war against the goblins. Why else do you think they control all of our money? The only way they'd accept our last surrender was if we'd permanently cede to them control over our economy so that, if necessary, they could end a new war before it began."

Cornelius slid into his seat and looked pale. "What do we do?" he whispered. With the sole exception of Croaker and Bones, everyone was stunned by the revelation.

"It's clear that our force is insufficient to do as the Wizengamot wants," Lucius said from behind the Minister. No one present knew exactly which department he represented, but everyone knew not to question his presence if they wanted to keep their jobs.

"We'll have to hire enough wizards," Fudge declared, latching onto Lucius' comment and zeroing in on the size issue.

Umbridge sat back watching and calculating. The numbers seriously unnerved her, but if they used the right kind of spells, they could negate any overwhelming force, she reasoned.

"Cornelius," she said in a simpering tone, "this is beyond the remit of all of our departments. I suggest we create a new department to manage this new force and give it direction. If you want, I'll be happy to oversee its operation."

Fudge smiled and nodded to her. "Capital! Simply capital!" he exclaimed.

Croaker and Amelia exchanged a pained look that also contained relief. At least when this blew up it wouldn't involve them.

"Delores, while you're dealing with the Goblins I also want something done about Dumbledore. He's becoming a liability and a danger to the wizarding public," Cornelius declared.

Umbridge looked up and grinned maliciously at her boss before nodding eagerly. She'd always wanted to take that blood traitor down a few pegs.

No one realized it at the time, but the decision to raise an army was in direct violation of the treaty the Ministry had with the Crown, who reserved the right to raise an army to itself.

The Weyrs of Earth were established based solely on the needs of the dragons. Disko Island Weyr was an ancient refuge of the dragon clans before it became the hatching Weyr. The island was incapable of sustaining a large population of dragons until the Government of Greenland was asked if the dragons could use the space. Now the Weyr is the central hatching Weyr, with its large enclosed stadium for hatchings. It's also a popular tourist spot for people who want to experience Weyr life.

Excerpt from The Weyrs of Earth by Remus John Lupin, published 2040.

Author's Notes, Laundry list and Mockeries:

- To all those that are suggesting slash and exclaiming how much they enjoy slash and how great this story would be if it were slash. Here's a clue. Look at what we write. We don't write slash. Ever. Don't read it, don't write it and its not going to happen here. If you want slash, write your own story.

- Suggestions. We like seeing suggestions from people, some of them are interesting, some of them are downright silly. But everyone needs to understand that as you sit here reading chapter five, I am currently writing chapter fourteen. While your suggestions are sometimes amusing and sometimes interesting, they never really get used because your suggestions are based on what your seeing now, and not what I'm writing.

- For the guy not expecting any titanic struggles. Well things take time to build to a head. World War II had its roots in an earlier war and took years to ferment. Relax, smell the daisies. All good things come to those with the patience to wait for them.

- And so we have the reconciling between Harry and Hermione that everyone has been begging for. Does that mean this will be a Harry/Hermione ship? Possibly. Maybe. No. Or yes. I know, annoying uninformative but hey if I told you what was going to happen you wouldn't need to read the chapters.

- I'd like to define a term for people that seemed to see only half of the phrase. In the last authors notes I spoke about 'tasteful smut'. If you read our stories you will find one or two sex scenes that start to get racy before fading to black. We don't write sex scenes, there'll be no thrusting man meat, no ramming hot rods or irons etc. Sometimes, rarely we get a little graphic, but generally we prefer to leave it to your own dirty little minds to fill in the details. We know you're more perverted than we are and couldn't do it better than your imagination. With that said, "tasteful" smut, sometimes. Wank material never.

- To the people that wrote hating our disclaimers. We're sorry to hear about the death of your sense of humor. We thought about taking up a collection to pay for a humor transplant, but we can't appear to make any sort of money from these chapters. I'm afraid you'll have to live with it.

- Coming next chapter! EXCITING WORDS! THRILLING GRAMMAR! SHOCKING PUNCTUATION! STAY TUNED TO THIS DRAGON CHANNEL! We'd reveal what's in store but no one sent us either that telescope or any donuts. Sorry.

Standard Disclaimer:

"You did it again didn't you?" spat Alyx angrily.

Bob looked up at her in consternation. "Did what?" he prevaricated.

"You forgot to write the disclaimer! You know how much trouble we're going to have over this?" Alyx exclaimed.

Bob ducked and hid behind his desk. For some reason she was gesticulating wildly while holding a pair of chain saws in her hands. One of the chain saws hit his computer, sawing it in half.

Bob grimaced. "I hope you're happy now. What I did have of the disclaimer, including the nude skydiving scene with Alan Rickman, just got sawn in half!" He wasn't about to tell her about the parachute malfunction nor the mid air collision with a jumbo jet.

Alyx looked longingly at the destroyed computer and whimpered.

"I'll have to resort to plan B I guess," Bob declared.

"What's plan B?"

Bob grinned evilly. "You're going to say the disclaimer while tap dancing across the stage."

"But I don't know how to tap dance!" protested Alyx.

"I have that covered. Instant Tap dancing lessons through the use of a high powered TASER!" Bob declared.

He reached into his back pocket and pulled out a four foot long Taser rifle that was plugged into a 440 volt industrial circuit.

"220,000 volts from this baby," he whispered lovingly.

"You can't shoot me with that!"

Alyx jolted as the TASER darts sunk into her thigh and her feet beat a staccato against the floor. "You bastard!" she said, panting. A wisp of smoke came from her thigh. "You got me in my 'I love Sean Connery Tatto!'"

"Now tell the nice people we don't own Harry Potter or the Dragon Riders of Pern or your NASCAR tat goes next," Bob said. His hand moved to the "ZAP" button.

Bob glanced towards the audience, and while he was looking away Alyx worked frantically to remove the barbed darts.

"On with the chapter folks, Alyx and I need to discuss this more. Happy Reading!"

The most unusual reserve is found in Tibet. There the wizards in control refuse to cull their herds, preferring instead to allow the beasts to live their lives naturally. It amazes this author's mind that they can have access to such valuable resources so close at hand and yet the dragon handlers of Tibet eek out a living scratching in the dirt.

Excerpt from *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find them* by Newt Scamander. Published 1927.

Campbeltown Weyr, Scottish West Coast, January 18th...

Harry sat at his desk, having spent the morning studying and working with Chekiath on their flight exercises. He now found himself up to his eyeballs in plans for the training of potential riders.

"You look tired."

He looked up and spotted Dan Granger standing in his doorway.

"Oh, hi, Mister Granger," he said a bit uneasily. He had done his best to avoid the man since his first night at the Weyr.

"May I come in? I'd like to talk to you."

Harry nodded and motioned to a seat in front of his desk.

Dan sat and looked a bit uncomfortable. "Harry, my father once said the bravest thing a man could do was admit he was wrong. I didn't understand what he meant at the time, but now I think I do. When we arrived I said some harsh words that were untrue and undeserved. Your reaction to my comments was better than mine

would have been at your age. You chose to ignore my comments and decided to concentrate on more important matters."

Dan leaned back on his chair and shook his head. "I have had my wife and my daughter yell at me before for things I've done. But this was different. I hurt you and Hermione at the same time. I'm sorry for my comments. They were uncalled for."

Harry shrugged. "You were upset and worried about Hermione."

"I was," Dan agreed, "But there was no excuse for blaming you for troubles you didn't cause."

Harry thought about it for a moment. He didn't want to drag this out. "Very well. I don't think you need to apologize, but since you did, I'll accept it."

Dan smiled in relief. "So what are you working on?"

He pointed at the pile of paper on his desk. "Hermione took all my notes on dragon care, so I figured I'd work a bit more on a plan for the potential riders. I figured they could learn more about dragons while they wait for the hatching. Once Hermione is finished with my notes, I'll go back to them."

"Harry, I know I'm not your father, but if you need someone to talk to," Dan said hesitantly.

Harry looked up and peered at him for a moment, then he sighed heavily. "I take it Hermione told you about my home life?"

"Only small pieces," Dan admitted. "It wasn't until this year and going back and rereading some of her letters that we realized that things weren't very good for you. Hermione didn't realize it, but then she wouldn't. She hasn't been trained like Emma and I to spot problems with teens and children."

Harry tensed and looked unhappy. "I guess it doesn't matter much anymore, sir. I don't talk about it, especially in front of Sirius or Remus because they'd pop down to Surrey and kill my Aunt and Uncle. I just want to put it behind me and forget it ever happened."

"You can do that if you like," Dan replied softly. "But no one can make you forget the past. Well, not without magic. My point is that it will always be there, sitting on your shoulder. You can lessen the impact it has on you by talking to someone, but you can never make it go completely away.

"I know, to you, I'm a stranger, though I hope that will change. But if you'll accept one piece of advice Harry, find someone you're comfortable with and just talk to them. You don't need advice on how to deal with them, as they're out of your life now. But their impact on who you are now and what you'll be in the future remains. Find an adult you can trust and talk with them."

He nodded uneasily. Mister Granger was probably right, even if the topic wasn't easy for him.

Dan stood. "Well, I've said my piece. Thank you for your time."

Harry looked up at the man. "Thank you, sir," he replied, still considering the older man's words.

Dan smiled and walked from the room.

Headmaster's office, Hogwarts, January 20th...

The door to the Headmaster's office opened and Minerva escorted Garrick Ollivander into his office.

"Garrick, it is good to see you again," Albus said, then he motioned for his long time friend to have a seat.

"It's good to see you as well, Albus, but I can't help but wonder what mischief you've been getting up to here."

Albus arched an eyebrow. "Mischief? Me?"

Garrick smiled thinly and accepted the cup of tea that Minerva offered him. "I hear rumors, Albus. The alley is rife with whispers that you are advocating the use of Wizard Heartstrings in wands."

Albus sighed. "I am appalled to hear that, old friend. I was merely using the idea as an example, not as a bona fide promotion of the

idea. And strangely enough, this ties into the reason why I asked you to visit today."

Garrick sipped his tea. "Oh?" he said carefully.

"No doubt you've heard what happened to Harry Potter during the first task. But did you also hear the tale that dragons are intelligent?" asked Albus.

Ollivander stared at the man for a moment. "Albus, surely you can't be serious."

"It's true, Garrick, and it also explains part of the reason why the dragon reserves are in such a state. They can communicate between themselves and between others. I've seen it myself," declared Minerva.

"So that's why you used the Wizard's heartstring idea, comparing wizards to dragons. No wonder Madam Bones was incensed. She's normally a level headed person, but your suggestion would imply we've been murdering a race for centuries."

"And we have," Minerva said firmly.

Ollivander started and turned to stare at Minerva.

"Garrick, I called you here because I have learned something that might help with your particular aspect of the dragon crisis," Albus interjected before Minerva and Ollivander could start arguing.

Ollivander turned back to Albus, who held his attention by producing a crudely made wand. "I'll grant you my workmanship is quite poor, but if you would try casting something with this?"

Ollivander reluctantly accepted the wand and held it out. "Avis," he murmured. A number of small birds shot from the tip of the wand and he raised an eyebrow. "This feels like a heartstring, but it's not the same."

"No, it isn't," Albus replied. "What would you say if we could show you a source of wand cores that replaced heartstrings, but didn't kill the dragon?"

Ollivander frowned and banished the birds using the same wand. "I'd want to know more."

Dumbledore opened a drawer and withdrew two scales, one of which had a small piece sliced from the center. "Dragons drop scales as they grow. It's a natural process and they continue to drop scales until they hit full growth at around a year and a half. During that first year, a dragon is constantly shedding scales and replacing them."

Albus lifted up the intact scale that Hagrid had gotten for him. "Lumos," he murmured. The six inch wide flat disk began to glow brightly and Ollivander leaned forward with wide eyes.

"Remarkable," he murmured, then he leaned back in his chair and scowled. "I see where you're heading with this, Albus, but it still won't work. There are over 200 potion ingredients derived from dragon products. You wrote the definitive work on the 12 uses of dragon blood that's still in use today! Even if I replace heartstrings with scales it won't solve the problem."

Albus smiled. "No, it won't, old friend, but solving the problem means tackling it. That's what I'm hoping to do here, one problem at a time. To my undying shame, I know what damage I created in working on dragon blood. I'll return to the analogy I gave Amelia, though she misinterpreted it badly. I might as well have done that research on French Blood. That's how I now feel about it."

Ollivander nodded unhappily. He could see his friend's point. He looked at the scales in his hand and the poorly crafted wand that was clearly functional. He sighed and realized that, like Albus, it was time to take a stand.

"If you don't mind, I'll play with these items and see if I can improve on them," he eyed the wand distastefully and Minerva chuckled loudly. "I suppose at some point I'll need to talk to Mr Potter."

He glanced up and smiled at their surprised looks. "Oh, come now. We all know who's representing the dragons. I'll admit that I was unsure, but the reports I'd heard about the reserves didn't sound like normal dragon behavior. If they are like you claim, then they obviously have a champion. Who better than your missing champion?"

Albus shook his head mirthfully. "You always were an observant one, Garrick."

Ollivander's expression sobered. "Yes, well, about that. Since we're all sharing secrets, there is a rumor going around the alley and I've managed to confirm at least one part of it."

Albus raised an eyebrow. "Oh? What whispers have you heard?"

Ollivander pulled his own wand and cast a privacy charm around them, then he holstered his wand. "I have been informed by several Aurors that they are training to take down a very powerful and very dangerous wizard. At first I didn't pay it much attention, but then I saw Dimitri Yanakov in the alley. He actually had the temerity to stop by my shop for a social visit!"

Dumbledore frowned. In Ollivander's youth he had nearly killed Yanakov. The man was undoubtedly one of the finest and most powerful enchanters in Europe, he was also a certified pedophile who avoided jail by living in a country where his particular fetish wasn't illegal. Dumbledore and Ollivander had been sent to see him by the ICW before their assault on Grindelwald. The ICW had commissioned Yanakov to make high powered magic suppressing manacles that would be used if they could capture Grindelwald.

Ollivander had located the man in a run down hotel and was outraged to see the thirteen year old muggle girl pleading for someone to help her. It was the only time Albus could recall Garrick pulling a wand in anger.

"Yanakov had been drinking and no doubt when he left my shop he headed to Knockturn Alley for some entertainment," Ollivander spat. "But while he was in my shop, he bragged that our vaunted Ministry had commissioned him to make a new set of manacles."

Ollivander shook his head in dismay. "Albus, I've thought long and hard about who the Ministry could possibly need those disgusting manacles for and I came up with only a few names. The first was Sirius Black. He's strong, but not strong enough to warrant specially made manacles. Harry Potter is certainly at or beyond our level of power, but he is missing and the Ministry doesn't know where to look for him.

"There is also our missing Dark Lord and, all modesty aside, there is myself. But I can't see them wanting to arrest me. There is Alejandro Croaker, who is powerful and too canny to be caught unawares by anyone the Ministry trains."

"And that leaves me," murmured Albus unhappily.

Minerva sucked in a deep breath. "Albus," she said in alarm.

He smiled reassuringly at her. "They can plan and plot, my dear, but I still have a few tricks up my sleeve."

Albus leaned back in his chair and was silent for a moment, then he turned to one of the shelves. "Clarence?"

"Yes, Headmaster?" replied the hat.

"Should anything happen to me, I want you to assume full control of the school wards, but please talk to and listen to Minerva. Ideally, I would prefer to give her the headship, but I know the Ministry would not allow that and she would be in danger if I did. If you would maintain control, but work with Minerva, I think that would be best for the school."

The hat tilted towards Minerva for a moment and the room filled with a humming noise. When it died down, the hat straightened. "It's not exactly according to the charter, Headmaster, but Hogwarts realizes this is a special situation. Hogwarts will agree to follow the Deputy Headmistress' advice with two exceptions. She will not allow the relaxation of the Code of Conduct, nor will she allow a Board of Governors or the Ministry to have any say in how our school is run."

Albus glanced over at Minerva, who nodded tearfully. She didn't want his job. She wanted to teach and to know her students were safe. Albus was a close personal friend and colleague and now she had to worry about him, as well.

"Thank you, Clarence, and please thank Hogwarts for us," Albus said softly.

"Headmaster?"

"Yes, Clarence?"

"Hogwarts wants you to know that she is proud to have you in charge. She had been growing increasingly alarmed by the situation, but you've spent a lot of time and effort to correct the problems here at the school. She also wants you to know that Harry Potter was one of her favorite children and she wants him to know he will always be welcome here."

Albus pulled a handkerchief from his pocket and wiped at his eyes, then he looked up at the hat. "Thank you both," he replied sincerely. "I will tell him what you said."

The hat bent its tip, as if bowing, then fell silent again.

Ollivander stood up and smiled at his friends. "I should return home. Take care of yourself, Albus. Remember what you once told me; there's no dishonor in retreating to fight another day."

Albus nodded. He'd told Garrick that on a cold night in Bavaria, when they'd stumbled upon a cadre of Knights of Walpurgis. They were outnumbered and both lightly injured.

Ollivander left via the floo and Minerva and Albus settled into an uneasy silence. The Ministry was getting desperate if they had hired Yanakov. His manacles caused intense pain and insanity if worn long enough.

"Where would you go?" asked Minerva.

Albus looked down at his desk and thought for a moment longer. "I am not sure. Fawkes would take me anywhere I wanted to go."

Fawkes trilled a loud note and both of them shook with the image of dragons.

Albus smiled at his familiar. "Thank you, Fawkes. That is a capital idea, actually. I'm sure Harry wouldn't mind us visiting with him and I'm sure we could find a way to make ourselves useful."

Minerva shook her head sadly. "Just when I think we're making progress, things slide backwards again," she muttered.

"It's not all that bad, Minerva. Fawkes can still carry messages between you and I, or he can even bring you to visit with us. Just remember that if you're pressed, deny having anything but the most basic ward influence on the school. They can't arrest the school, but if they suspect you are in charge, they can and will arrest you."

Campbeltown Weyr, Scottish West Coast, January 25th...

Chekiath appeared high above the Weyr and lazily circled as he descended. Harry tightened his legs slightly as Chekiath swooped back and forth, delighting both of them with the flying.

"The Fuzzy One is flying Narth again," Chekiath commented.

Harry's looked around and he could see a dot above the Weyr but still far below them. Narth was a yearling who'd befriended Hermione after she helped Hagrid deal with a bad infection. Both the dragons and the humans were coming to find that it was possible to form an intense bond of friendship and respect between an adult human and an adult dragon.

Narth was a Common Welsh Green who was uniquely suited to Hermione. The dragon came from a long line of dragons who'd lived free in Britain for centuries and she was capable of offering Hermione glimpses into British History that few humans ever saw.

"She is working hard to conquer her fear, Harry. I don't think she's afraid to fly anymore, but it will never be her favorite mode of travel."

"I can't fault that, Cheki," Harry replied. "She's come a long way in a very short amount of time. When the eggs are ready, I think she'll be on the hatching grounds."

"I agree. She will make a good rider, but she's a bit stuffy."

"Don't tell her that, Cheki! Just because she didn't like you threatening to eat her cat doesn't make her stuffy," Harry protested.

"Harry, she doesn't laugh very much. Watch," Chekiath replied, then he folded his wings close to his body and dived toward the speck flying a thousand feet below them.

Harry whooped joyously at the thrill of the dive.

Chekiath passed Narth close enough to nearly clip her and pulled out of his dive to the outraged shout of Hermione.

Harry and Chekiath both laughed and Chekiath dove once more before flaring out and coming to an easy landing. He was nearly forty feet long now and easily able to handle Harry in the air.

Chuckling, Harry slid down from his spot and affectionately pat Chekiath on his long neck.

"See? She's not laughing."

Harry looked up and winced. Hermione was coming in for a landing and she looked pissed at his flyby. He couldn't help note she looked rather pretty on dragonback, but downright silly when climbing off of the dragon. She might have learned to master her fear of flying, but she still clung to the dragon and slowly inched down it when dismounting.

"Harry James Potter, are you trying to kill yourself and your dragon?" Hermione yelled.

Harry unzipped his flying jacket and pushed the goggles up on his head, then he grinned at her. "I'm sorry, Hermione, but Chekiath was just trying to prove a point."

She glared at him. "And what point would that be?" she said with a hint of a snarl. By now all the signs of a full blown Hermione explosion were present; hands on the hips, a patented glare of death, eyebrows bunched tightly together.

Harry knew the signs, but this time he had an out. "Don't look at me like that, Hermione, Cheki says you don't laugh enough!" He replied, waving a hand towards his dragon.

Chekiath turned to look at Harry. "But you agreed with me."

Harry winced and Hermione turned to glare at him again. "Well, you don't," he mumbled. "Look, no ones saying you need to be a practical joker and compete with Sirius for the title of Weyr Fool, but you could stand to relax and laugh now and then."

Hermione crossed her arms over her chest and huffed at him in annoyance.

He sighed. "Just relax for a few hours. Fly for the fun of it. Practice your magic because it's fun, instead of trying to learn a new spell."

She continued to glare at him and he shook his head sadly.

"You're one to talk, Harry. You're up before dawn every morning."

Harry scowled. "I am, but I'm also responsible for five hundred and three dragons and a handful of people. And I have to worry about all the other dragons, as well. I know my schedule stinks, but I still try to take some time everyday to just fly Chekiath. Not because I have to or because I need the practice. I fly because it's fun. You do remember fun, don't you?"

Harry's clothes suddenly shimmered and Hermione's jaw fell open. Harry looked down at himself and sighed. He was dressed from head to toe in a bunny costume.

"Weyr Fool, Harry?" asked Sirius in a dangerous voice.

Harry turned, exposing to Hermione a twitching little puff ball tail and she slid to the ground, laughing uproariously.

"I can explain, Sirius.. Honest!" Harry said.

When Sirius raised his wand, he turned and bolted around the corner of a building.

Sirius chuckled and walked over to Hermione and held out a hand. She gave him a grateful smile and stood with his help.

"Maybe you don't laugh much like Harry claims, but he's working too hard. He'll spend the next hour hiding and trying to undo that spell. It'll be good for him," Sirius said with a smug grin.

Later that evening, everyone gathered in the Kitchen Hall. The nightly bonfire had been replaced by the warm hall and hot drinks. They reserved the fire for Saturday nights now, making a special occasion out of it.

Harry stood and looked over the assembled faces. There were a lot more of them now. The Grangers were present, seated next to Sirius and Remus. Captain Atkins sat next to Sirius, as had become her habit. Sir Robert sat with Lord Mills and May. Hagrid joined them nearby, sitting on a special chair made for him.

He glanced down at his list and picked up a pen. "I'll start off. I've been told that the eggs are all laid now at Disko Island. Thanks to Dobby and the dragons, the newly enlarged hatching chamber is well coated with heated sands and we have room for visitors to watch the impressions.

Dobby who sat in the corner blushed at the praise.

"There are more eggs than anticipated, but far fewer than there could have been. Spath informs me that the other Weyrs have severely curtailed their egg laying this season. We took in broody females from eighty five percent of the world wide Weyrs. Those Weyrs that did not get the chance to send a egg heavy female this time will get their chance next time. Hopefully, by next hatching, we'll be able to spare some riders to search for potentials."

"Harry?"

He looked up from his list. "Yes, Remus?"

"How many total eggs are there?"

"We were anticipating roughly twenty eggs this time around, but we ended up with a total of thirty two. We have a list of potential riders that the dragons say 'could' impress. Unfortunately, we built a list to be double the number of expected eggs. So we're short potentials. At this late date, I'm not sure we can find enough potentials to suit our needs. I'm afraid we're going to have to go with the forty people we have listed and hope the dragons find them all acceptable," Harry replied.

That the dragons could control their egg laying came as a complete surprise to everyone. But Spath explained that they never wanted to allow too many dragons to be born under the control of the wizards. Remus then pointed out that it wasn't really that unusual. It was known that dragon populations declined during the intervals between falls and increased just before falls began.

"Damn," swore Remus. "There isn't really enough time to find solid potential riders."

Everyone nodded in agreement. The problem was simple. The dragons could tell who had the sensitivity to impress in an instant, but then they needed to figure out if they were worthy enough to impress. Some candidates were observed by the dragons and found unworthy. In one case, a boy was capable of impressing, but they found he was stalking and spying on several girls in his class. Having the ability and being worthy of impressing were two different things.

In that particular case, Lord Mills was informed and he tipped off the local police, who caught the boy in the act. It solved that particular problem and clearly illustrated the need to picking potential riders with care.

And that meant each potential had to be watched for several days. The Hogwarts students were slightly different because both Harry and Remus had spent time with all of the students in question.

Harry's take on it was simple; each of the people involved had minor character flaws, but nothing major enough to dismiss any of them as potential candidates. Even Malfoy would settle down if he impressed. Harry was certain of it, having experienced it for himself.

He glanced down at his list again and picked up where he left off. "Dobby will deliver notes to the Hogwarts students tomorrow. I am hoping to have them here by the end of the month to begin training them," he paused and looked up. "Hermione, you said you had something to add to that?"

She nodded and opened her ever present book bag. The bag had been charmed to be lightweight and deeper than normal by Remus. She pulled out a large stack of bound papers. "It was only because I've been reading and correcting your essays for the last four years that I could understand what you wrote," she said with a bit of a huff, then she turned back to the stack in front of her and started passing around what turned out to be small books. "I took your notes, made them legible and reorganized them into a handbook of dragon care that we can give to the potential riders."

Harry accepted the small book Sirius handed him and looked at it. It was titled, "The Official Handbook of Dragon Care", written by Harry James Potter, Edited by Hermione Jane Granger.

"Hermione?" Sirius called.

She stopped her lecture into the organization and layout of the book and looked at him. "Yes?"

"Since this is the official handbook, does that mean there's an unofficial one running around somewhere?" he asked with a straight face.

Dan Granger laughed. He loved his daughter dearly, but he'd had put up with this sort of thing for years. When she was six, she'd had him install a nameplate on her bedroom door that declared the room to be her official bedroom.

"Sirius Black!" she said in a bit of a snit. It took all her willpower not to stamp one foot down. It didn't help that even Harry was smiling broadly and shaking his head at her antics.

"Knowing Sirius, he's looking for the book with the naked photos," Remus quipped, then he ducked as a spell flew into the space where he had been.

Harry coughed and caught everyone's attention. "Settle down you two or we'll have another dragon dung war with you being targets."

Sirius immediately shut up and settled back down. He didn't want to end up covered in dragon dung again.

Harry eyed him for a moment, a little disappointed, then turned his attention back to Hermione. "Thank you, Hermione. I know these will be a great help. I understand that Hagrid is working on his own notes for dragon healing. You might want to see if we can do something similar. Someday we'll have enough people for us to be able to train Weyrhealers."

Hermione nodded happily and sat back down. The thought of something written by Hagrid made her cringe, but she was glad to see that Harry recognized the need for books, even one she hadn't considered.

Harry smiled at her for a moment longer, then he turned to his next item. "Hagrid? How are things on your end?"

Hagrid smiled. "Well, we're doin' better than I thought. Tha' muggle medicine works well enough fer clearin' up the infections, but we're goin' to need to start growin' what we need fer a pain relief potion. I can' keep havin' Dobby stealin' 'em."

Harry frowned. "We have the space to put up some greenhouses, but we don't have the people or the money for..."

He paused and looked at Lord Mills, who was chuckling quietly.

"James?"

"This ties into what I was going to report, but I currently have access to a Barclays account with nearly a million pounds in it. It's a misleading number because that can be easily spent, but I think we can afford to put up a greenhouse or two," Lord Mills said from his seat.

"Mind you, Harry," Sir Robert added, "this is all coming from what the dragons produce in a testing situation. I fully expect that at some point we'll be paying almost as much into the dragon fund as we currently send to the OPEC nations."

"At the same time?" Dan exclaimed in dismay.

"Oh, no, of course not. OPEC is going to find itself with a problem. Britain will be the first country to wean themselves from their cartel, but we won't be the last," Sir Robert declared. "We're keeping the dragons classified as a secret, but I can easily foresee a time in the future when the other governments will have to know about them. In fact, that will probably start to happen next year."

"Oh? Why is that?" Harry asked.

"At a minimum, we need to talk to the government of Greenland and let them know we're using part of their territory. Originally they were part of Denmark, but they were granted home rule in 1979." Sir Robert said.

Harry nodded, then he turned to Hagrid. "Since May has been training under you, let's see if we can get her started on putting together a list of what we need. Start with the ingredients for the pain relief potions you've been using."

May looked up and nodded eagerly. That was something she could easily do.

"I take it then that things are going well with you, Sir Robert?" asked Harry.

The little man grinned and bobbed his head. "Better than well, my boy! We have created a few tons of heated rocks and are busy experimenting with them. I won't bore you with all the nitty gritty details, but we've had a few companies express interest in getting involved. Additionally, we've had a number of companies who have gone to the government and expressed concern that we may put them out of business."

"What was the government's response to that, Sir Robert?" asked Dan Granger.

Lord Mills chuckled. "Mr Major told those particular businesses that they'd better get competitive then, as the government is not about to hold back on this. We had published a request for a research proposal that cited an unusual power source, you see. Unfortunately, it was enough to make some companies nervous and others interested."

Dan shook his head. "Never thought he'd have the balls to do that. Not up against the oil conglomerates."

"Daddy!" exclaimed Hermione.

Emma glared. "Dan!"

Dan winced. "What? It's true. He's as conservative as they come. Standing up against big business is against his religion!"

Lord Mills coughed lightly and the expanding Granger fight settled down. "Be that as it may, the PM recognizes that he has limited choices. He can't hide dragons forever. If he tried, they'd rebel. I'm sure that Harry could take his dragons to any other country he likes,

knowing that country would welcome the economic potential they represent. More to the point, he can't hide what they can do. So it's either get on-board first or be left behind.

"As a conservative party member myself, I can say big business isn't necessarily bad, Dan. But that's an argument for another time. The oil companies will lose a lot of business but there will always be a need for oil. It just won't be used for creating heat to power our cities."

"Well said! Well said!" Sir Robert exclaimed. "The Oil companies will merely find new markets or find their business shrinking to match the new, smaller demands."

Harry shook his head. This sort of thing went mostly over his head. He'd talked with Mister Granger about some of it and had come to respect the man and some of his views.

"Moving along. Do we have anything else? My list is done," he called.

"I do," James said. "I have fielded a request to host a private meeting between the PM and a dragon representative. We don't know where and when just yet, but the Queen would like to meet with you, Harry, and a few dragons. Mister Major is most uncomfortable with the idea of a teen leading the dragons, but he also knows he can't change it. I think he's come to the realization that the best thing to do is to help however possible in the hopes that you'll be willing to at least listen to any advice he might have."

Harry looked thoughtful, "I guess I don't have a problem with that. I am willing to listen to advice, but that doesn't mean I'll always take it. As for meeting the Queen?" He sighed. "It's necessary. But I am going to strongly suggest that Sir Robert brief her on dragon behavior before the meeting. She simply cannot expect responses that are diplomatically acceptable from them."

Sir Robert looked up in alarm. "What do you mean?"

Harry ran a hand through his hair nervously. "You look at the world with a kind of orderly wonder and you find delight in things that boggle my mind. But dragons are something even you have trouble with. They are very literal in some things and we've all experienced

their tendency to be embarrassingly blunt. When I explained to Spath about the Queen, he was in awe of a single female capable of producing millions of offspring. It took me nearly an hour to explain the difference and I'm still not sure he believed me."

Sir Robert blinked a moment, then he pulled out a small notebook and made a note. "Right, talk to the Queen," he muttered.

Harry smiled at the old man. He greatly admired him and wished he knew as much as the old man did, but he was a wonderful teacher when he actually took the time to explain things.

"James, would you let me know when we're supposed to meet? The only dates I see as bad would be the middle of next month, during the expected hatching time."

James nodded and made a note.

"Anything else?"

Sir Robert glanced around then he stood. "I do have something interesting to report."

Harry nodded and sat down. "In the last month we've been taking some small samples for analysis. Blood samples from dragons were most astonishing. The cobalt levels in the blood accounts for the distinct blue tinge it has. It was our first clear indication of the non-terrestrial origin of the dragons. They also have a higher amount of boron in their blood chemistry than normal.

Sir Robert looked up from his notes and smiled. "The first results of DNA sequencing have been astounding, to say the least. It's preliminary, and very very early in our studies, but I think we can assume that the story of the dragons jumping from another world to our own have been validated. The genetic make up of our dragons are clearly alien in origin, and yet there are segments of DNA that look like they have been spliced in from terrestrial sources. In other words, dragon DNA looks exactly like what we'd expect if humans took an alien species and changed it to suit their own needs."

Harry looked at Sir Robert with a bemused look. "This is big then?"

"This is very big, Harry," Emma replied for the little man. "It also suggests that many of the stories the dragons have been telling us aren't tales, but a true history."

Harry shrugged his shoulders. "To be honest, I never doubted them. I never had a reason to. But perhaps that's because Chekiath and I are bonded."

The others nodded. Only Hagrid and Harry had any real clue what the bonding was like.

"The exciting part about this, my boy, is that the DNA we're seeing suggests several possible areas of research," Sir Robert said. "It's really exciting stuff. Quite honestly, I wouldn't be surprised to discover some genetic researcher getting a Nobel from the research this is going to spawn."

Harry noted Hermione frowning so he turned to her. "Hermione? Something wrong?" he asked.

"No," she replied hesitantly. "I was just thinking about causality. We know the dragons are a result of very advanced genetic techniques, but did Sidraneth's jump into the past bring the clues needed to make those techniques possible?"

Sir Robert's eyes lit up with glee. "Delightful! The age old time travel debate. If you go back into the past and accidentally kill your grandfather, then you'd never be born and would have never gone back into the past to kill your grandfather."

Sirius leaned forward on his seat and clutched at his head. "Please, just trying to follow this is giving me a headache."

Harry stood and smiled, "And with that, let's call it a night."

Hogwarts Infirmary, January 28th...

The doors banged open and Minerva hurried into the room. Sitting on a bed, Albus looked up and smiled at her, while Madam Pomfrey worked on his arm. Minerva paled seeing the large blood stains on his robes.

"Calm yourself, Minerva. I'm fine," Albus said. "But I fear the Ministry might be getting desperate. I had just exited the sweet shop in Diagon Alley when I was attacked by several men from an alley opening. I saw two of them. If they're aurors, they must be new, as I didn't recognize either of them."

She took another step closer and eyed him carefully. He was paler than usual, but seemingly undaunted by the injury.

Poppy straightened up and put her wand away. "He'll be fine, Minerva. It's just a couple of nasty cuts. Messy, yes, but not really too bad. Now, do I want to know why you were attacked and why you think the Ministry was behind it?"

Fawkes trilled a warning note and Albus nodded. "Not here. Perhaps if we could meet in my office in ten minutes, Poppy? That would give me time to change into clean robes."

Poppy eyed the old man for a moment, then she reluctantly nodded.

Albus stood and smiled at the pair of ladies. "In ten minutes then," he said, then he turned and headed out of the infirmary.

"Is he really fine?" asked Minerva.

Poppy sighed. "He's as fine as I can make him. In that way, both he and Mister Potter are cut from the same cloth. Neither of them have any patience for extended stays in the infirmary."

Ten minutes later, both Poppy and Minerva were taking tea from an elf, while Albus settled himself into his chair with a barely hidden grimace. Poppy glanced at Minerva, who nodded slightly at her. She understood what Poppy was talking about now.

"Despite losing my role as chief warlock on the Wizengamot, there are those in power who see me as a threat to their power, Poppy. I daresay that, in the coming weeks, things here will change radically. Minerva will need your help and support more than ever," Albus said softly.

Fawkes trilled a comforting note and he smiled up at his friend.

"We had a warning that the Ministry may attempt to remove the Headmaster, Poppy," Minerva added quietly. "This isn't a case of leveling some sort of charge against him. It's little more than an assassination," she spat.

"Now, Minerva," Albus chided.

She turned on him. "What? How can you be so calm? Someone tried to kill you and you're sitting there pretending nothing is wrong!"

He shrugged. "What would you have me do? Rush down to the Ministry and accuse the Minister? You know he'll have no clue what I'm talking about. One of his underlings will be leading this effort and he's given his approval to it without having any direct knowledge of what actions are being taken."

Minerva sat back on her chair and looked very unhappy.

"My mistake," Albus said, "was that I figured they would do nothing until Yanakov was ready with his manacles. It took him nearly a year to make them for Grindelwald. Even if he's improved his techniques, I thought I had at least six months. I thought I would be safe until the end of the year, but now I see that isn't the case."

"What will you do?" exclaimed Poppy in alarm.

Albus smiled benignly at her. "Don't worry, Poppy, I have plans in place to remove myself to a safe location. Ordinarily, Minerva would assume my role as Headmaster, but that would only endanger her. The role of Headmaster carries considerable prestige in our world and it's coveted by the same people who think I'm a danger to their power. When I leave I will not pass on the role of Headmaster. No, I fear the Ministry would try to force Minerva out or just arrest her. I have made arrangements that both Minerva and I agree will be best for her and the school. That is why I said she'll need your support."

Poppy snorted. "She'll always have that," she declared firmly.

Albus leaned back and smiled softly. "There, you see, Minerva? One less thing to worry about," he declared.

She eyed him carefully and knew he wouldn't fully divulge his plans to her. "I don't like it, Albus. I didn't like it when you brought it up and I still don't like it."

"Can you suggest a better idea?" he countered.

She slumped in her seat. "No," she admitted unhappily.

"I'm not overly fond of it myself but at least the school will be safe. I'll rest easier knowing you are keeping an eye on things for me here," Albus said. He now knew he'd have to leave the school much earlier than he had expected.

Poppy looked between the two and understood that she wouldn't know exactly what was planned until it happened. She had revised her opinion of the Headmaster several times since the task that cost them Harry Potter. Now she held a grudging respect for the old man, having lost the awe she once held. She could see he was trying to make things better.

Albus watched the two ladies file from his office a few minutes later, then he turned to Fawkes. "I fear our time here is coming to an end, dear friend. I think we'll have to leave when the students go to Harry. Yes, leaving when the children do, or shortly after, will cause the Ministry to focus their efforts on me and turn their attention away from the school, at least for a while."

Fawkes nodded and trilled a happy note. He didn't mind the idea of going to live with the dragons. They were something new and he would enjoy speaking with them.

Hogsmeade, February 1st...

Susan Bones had an elf shrink her trunk and it now sat comfortably in her pocket. That was the easy part. Explaining to her dorm mates that she had to send it home for repairs wasn't too hard either, although she didn't like lying to her friends.

No, the hard part was standing there in the shadow of the Shrieking Shack shivering in the cold and waiting for her portkey to kick in. She had mistakenly arrived early, but wasn't surprised to see she wasn't alone. Luna Lovegood nodded happily to her. Wayne Hopkins from her own house was there, too, and so was Draco

Malfoy and Lee Jordan. All in all, it was quite a group, representing pure blood, half blood and muggle born, with no apparent reasoning to the mix.

Draco stood off to one side looking very unsure of himself. Nearby, Millicent Bulstrode stood, as if she derived some comfort from being near another Slytherin.

Katie Bell glanced at her watch. "Three minutes," she called, then she fished a coin out of her pocket. She and Lee Jordan were the oldest students present, so everyone followed her example and took out their portkeys, making sure they had a good grip on them.

The remaining time seemed to drag, and when the portkey finally did activate, it caught Susan by surprise. In a split second the space where the students had clustered was empty.

Headmaster's Office, Hogwarts, Feb 1st...

Albus was busying working on some parchments when a voice interrupted his train of thought.

"Headmaster, a number of students have vanished from my ability to detect them," Clarence said from his shelf.

"Susan Bones, Draco Malfoy, Lee Jordan, Luna Lovegood?" he asked in surprise.

"Yes, and others, Headmaster. You know these students. You spoke to them personally in the past weeks."

Albus sighed. "It's time then," he said sadly.

Clarence twisted to face him. "I'm afraid so, Headmaster," replied the hat. "But Minerva is a worthy replacement. She will be a good Headmistress, when the time comes."

Albus nodded, then pulled out his wand, and with a flick, caused a great number of objects in the room to fly into a waiting box. The door to his private chambers opened and a large multi-compartment trunk flew into the office. As soon as the storm of objects died down, he shrunk down the box and his trunk, then pocketed both.

"Clarence, after I leave, send an Elf to Minerva with the note from my top drawer. I will ask Fawkes to visit her daily, so that we can maintain some communications."

The hat tipped in his direction and he turned to Fawkes.

"Headmaster?"

"Yes, Clarence?"

"Hogwarts wants you to know that you were a wonderful Headmaster. She is unhappy to lose you, but your duty is to your students, no matter where you find them."

A single tear rolled down the old man's cheek and he bowed his head. "Thank you, Clarence. And please thank her for me."

Fawkes sprang aloft and he reached for a tail feather. A moment later, there was a flash of fire and the office was empty.

The sorting hat chuckled softly. This was something entirely new to it and it was planning on taking some liberties with its new found freedom. The wards subtly shifted controls. Minerva maintained her light control, but Hogwarts pulled all the rest of the wards under her control, then ramped up the protections a notch.

Now any dangerous spell cast out of bounds would result in the caster being rendered incapacitated. The only place dangerous spells were now allowed was in the classrooms and only when a Professor was present.

Campbeltown Weyr, Hangar #2, February 1st...

Hermione stood nervously next to May. She was a bit out of her element here, but she had volunteered to help.

"Relax, Hermione. They're just kids, like you and I," May said with a smile. The pair had formed a friendship of sorts that both found unusual. May was nearly as studious as Hermione, although she studied muggle subjects. Both girls also had an interest in Harry, even though he wasn't aware of it.

She looked around the large empty building. The overhead halogen lamps lit the room with a harsh yellow light. There was a small stage and five rows of ten folding chairs each facing the stage. To one side, a huge space heater blew massive amounts of hot air towards the seats. Not far from the heater a table had been set up with large urns for coffee and tea. It wasn't the most hospitable of places, but it was the best they could come up with.

Near the first table was another, smaller table that held a large stack of books. Emma sat behind that table. Behind her was another table stacked with dozens of boxes she was prepared to hand out. Each box contained a dragon flight suit, jacket, goggles, gloves and hat. It was an outfit Harry had put together over May's objections. They were warm and comfortable and that was Harry's primary concern. May thought the outfit was not well coordinated, but she had to admit that it kept the rider comfortable, even when going Between.

Hermione glanced at her notes one final time and looked around. The building had most of the Weyr personnel already present. Only Harry was missing. The sound of an engine caused her to look up and she could see through the windows the luxury bus pulling up to the side of the building.

Lord Mills walked out of the hangar and waved to the first people stepping out of the bus.

She swallowed nervously when a noisy bunch of teens her own age started to enter the room and look around curiously.

"This way, everyone!" called James Mills, "Go to the table and get your kit, then help yourself to something hot to drink and grab a seat."

Hermione smiled slightly. The kit boxes, each the size of a shoe box, were charmed to be bigger on the inside to hold more. The first exposure of magic for these muggles would be those boxes. The second piece of magic they would experience would be the auto-sizing charm placed on the clothing inside those boxes.

Each teen had been first vetted by the dragons, then Lord Mills and Sir Robert had visited with their parents. After obtaining signatures on secrecy agreements, the parents were briefed about the project. Some details were omitted deliberately, but the parents all believed

their children would be presented with an opportunity unique in human history. It greatly helped matters that most of the students had been chosen from families where one or both parents were members of the military.

Most of the parents had been reluctant, but Lord Mills assured them that they would be well taken care of. He knew that the offer of scholarships from the government wouldn't be necessary, but he made it as a way of enticing the parents to agree. He already knew the kids would jump at the chance.

The pair of girls watched the group of muggles as they settled into seats, then May stepped forward. It had been decided that they would let the girls open with a welcome to the Weyr, easing them into things before they turned it over to the adults.

"If you'll all settle down, please? We still have a few more people we're waiting on," May told them as Captain Atkins, Dan Granger, Lord Mills, Remus and Sir Robert joined the girls on the stage. "You guys arrived a bit early, but we'll get started as soon as the others arrive."

At precisely 10 a.m., a group of people appeared off to one side. Sirius and Hagrid were waiting for them.

Hagrid beamed at the students, some of which he knew fairly well.

"Hagrid!" Luna squealed, then she ran to hug the large man.

He patted her on the back and looked down at her fondly. She was one of the few students who shared his love of magical animals.

"If you'll just go over to that table," Sirius said, pointing towards Emma, who was beckoning them.

The group shuffled forward nervously. The alien surrounding had them worried. There was a loud muggle machine blowing hot air and the overhead lights were unlike anything they had experienced before.

Hermione stepped forward with a big smile. "Hogwarts students, just relax. Nothing bad is going to happen. In fact, if all goes well, things are going to change for the better for all of us."

Several of the Hogwarts students looked up at her and smiled, recognizing a familiar face. Then more relaxed when they spotted Remus up on stage. The Hogwarts students took up the remaining empty seats, trying to stay close to each other.

May stepped next to Hermione and said, "There's a lot of material to cover here and some of it is going to come as quite a shock to people. Please, everyone relax and understand that no one is any trouble or any danger here. Your parents have had the situation explained to them before we even considered asking you if you'd be willing to help the government on a special project. There's no danger to be found here and I'm pretty sure you're going to be enjoying yourselves immensely."

Several of the muggle students had been alarmed by the arrival of the Hogwarts students, but most weren't looking in the right direction to see them appear. Everyone slowly settled in and focused on the people on the stage.

"Welcome to the Campbeltown Weyr. You people have been selected to help in an endeavor that has never before been seen, let alone attempted, in the whole of our shared history on this planet. There are two different groups sitting here today. But soon, very soon, you will be part of just one group," Hermione said.

She pulled out her wand and sent several chairs floating over their heads. "My name is Hermione Granger, and I am a witch. I can do magic."

"You think you can impress us with a simple stage magician's trick?" called one boy.

Hermione smiled sweetly and with a silent flick of her wand, the boy was upside down and rotating. "Explain that then," she replied calmly. "Magic exists. Like it or not, there are two types of humans on this planet; those that can do magic and those that can't. You non magical humans outnumber us by a thousand to one. Because of pure superstition, the magical society withdrew from mainstream human life and hid itself to escape the witch hunts and inquisitions."

She flicked her wand the boy was back in his seat, staring at her with wild eyes. A number of the muggle students were nodding in understanding at her statements.

"That magic exists and has remained hidden from your society for hundreds of years isn't why we brought you here. I only tell you that magic exists because ten of you can do magic. Ten of you are from a magical school and were chosen to be part of our endeavor," May added. "I am May McNulty, and like most of you, I am not a witch. Before I learned what you're about to learn, I was going to be a veterinarian and work for the family my family has served for generations. Now, I still intend to study biology, but my goals have radically changed after I learned what you're about to learn."

James Mills looked up and smiled at May. He wasn't surprised by her dream of being a veterinarian, or her dream to work on the island and be his veterinarian.

A girl in the back row raised a hand and May nodded to her.

"If magic is real, then are the other things real? Unicorns, Mermaids? Santa Claus?" the girl asked.

Remus laughed and with a flick of his wand, produced an image of a unicorn. He stood and walked over to stand next to May. "Unicorns and Mermaids are real. So are hundreds of other mythical beasts, some terrible and dangerous and some that just scream at you to cuddle with them. But we're getting ahead of ourselves. And no, I'm sorry to say, Santa isn't real."

The girl nodded and looked very pleased by the unicorn image, while several others seemed awe-struck. It seemed like a good deal of their dreams were true, after all.

He paused and waved a hand towards the people seated behind him. "First, let me introduce Sir Robert March, chief government advisor on scientific affairs. If the PM or the Queen need to know about a scientific problem, he is the person they turn to. He is also leading the research here at the Weyr, as well as helping us set up our facilities. We will try to arrange to have a round table meeting with Sir Robert at least once a week, so that you can talk about what you've learned."

"Next to him is Lord James Mills, MP. He is also the chief financial officer for the Weyr, so when it comes to complaining about your salaries, you'll complain to him," Remus joked with a smile.

James laughed. At the moment, no one was drawing any kind of salary, but he easily saw that changing very soon. And given the kind of money the Weyr might be making, salaries could be substantial.

"Mister Daniel Granger has been helping where he can, but I suspect at some point he's hoping to return to his original field by becoming the Weyr dentist. His wife was the lady who gave you your kits, and I think she's having too much fun doing a lot of different things to return to being a dentist."

Emma shot Remus a grin from her seat and nodded.

"For now, however, the Doctors Granger have volunteered to be monitors for the male and female dorms. They will be performing bed checks, so behave yourselves. We'll provide you with plenty of opportunities for social mixing.

"Captain Katherine Atkins is on loan from the British Army and she's in charge of Weyr security. She is also the person who will probably be overseeing any physical training you might receive. I might add that the guard force is mostly British Army and totally under Captain Atkins control. She's in charge of making sure that no unauthorized persons get onto the Weyr. If she gives you an order, do it, and ask her why later. I am sure she'll have a valid reason for it and she'll be willing to share it with you at the appropriate time.

"And finally, I am Remus Lupin and, as you probably guessed, I am a wizard."

Remus moved back and sat down after nodding to Sir Robert, who smiled his thanks and stood up next.

"You are all here because you have been selected. The government became aware of a grave crime being committed and we're taking steps to put a halt to it. Many of you are here because you come from military families, and therefore understand the concept of secrecy," Sir Robert told them seriously.

"All of you have signed confidentiality contracts to keep what you learn here secret. And despite the seriousness of the situation, I envy everyone of you, for you are going to help us in dealing with a truly alien intelligence."

Sir Robert nodded to Remus, who created another image, this time of a dragon.

Almost as one, the students sucked in a deep breath. Each of the muggle students had been vetted by the dragons themselves and they knew they wouldn't have the typical reaction to the idea of dragons that most people might. Most of these students were top grade earners who dreamed and wrote fantasy stories with heroes and mighty dragons and magic. In a way, they were, as a group, some of the most open minded people they could have picked.

"You'll note," Sir Robert said, pointing to the image, "that the mouth isn't formed for speech. Dragons are capable of a wide variety of vocalizations, but they cannot speak. Instead, they rely on telepathy to speak to their riders and others."

"It's beautiful," murmured one blonde.

"Not much is going to happen today," Sir Robert said. "We're going to introduce you to dragons and help get you settled in. Tomorrow, we'll hold a morning session in this hangar before holding a class in the afternoon on caring for a dragon. As part of your kit, you received a book on dragon care. Read it, study it. But don't be afraid to question it. It's still in development and it's very possible that you'll discover something inaccurate in it."

Sir Robert paused and frowned as Albus Dumbledore appeared in a flash of flame. Fawkes circled above the Headmaster in the large open space, singing a welcome that affected everyone.

Sirius immediately hustled over to Albus and the two spoke quietly for a moment before Sirius motioned to Sir Robert to continue. While Sir Robert spoke of dragons and how they communicated Sirius led Dumbledore out of the building.

Sir Robert looked at the anxious faces and smiled widely. "I don't need to have magic to know that many of you are saying, 'Will this old man just get to showing us the dragons already?'"

A ripple of embarrassed laughter filled the hangar and many admitted he was on the mark. Sir Robert nodded to Lord Mills, who walked over to a large switch. With a flick of his finger, the massive hangar doors slowly opened. All heads turned to the large opening space with curious looks.

"Go look," Sir Robert told them gently and with just a touch of envy. "See what the future holds for you."

The students sat for a moment, then Hermione laughed, hopped down from the stage and walked over to the opening. That caused the rest of the students to follow her.

Overhead, Harry wheeled his dragon in perfect formation with his Weyr. It was the first time anyone other than Harry had seen all five hundred and three dragons airborne at the same time.

It was a majestic sight to see so many dragons flying in rows of V formations overhead.

Their formation was precise and tight, with almost no room between each dragon. Harry signaled and the entire Weyr banked hard and headed for the space in front of the hangar. As they flew over, wings of twenty dragons at a time peeled off and landed until just Harry, Spath and Selanth remained in the air, then they landed in front of the massed Weyr.

Momnarth had wanted to be there, but she was minding the single egg she had laid at Disko.

Harry smoothly dismounted from Chekiath and gave him an affectionate thump, then he turned to face a group of totally awed humans. Even members of the guard force stopped their rounds to watch the Weyr flying in formation.

"Harry, did we break them? Even the Fuzzy One is frozen." Chekiath said worriedly.

"I don't think so," He said peering at the silent people.

Suddenly, one blond broke ranks with the others and she ran up to the nearest dragon she could get to and tried to wrap her arms around his leg.

"This is brilliant!" exclaimed Luna Lovegood. She then released the dragon and turned to Harry. "Can they help us find Snorkacks?"

Harry blinked. "Ummm, maybe. I don't know. Cheki?"

"Snorkacks? Are they tasty?" replied his dragon.

"Cheki," Harry said with a bit of a whine, "You can't go through life wondering if everything is tasty. You'll frighten people."

"But I don't eat people. Remember, we don't eat our friends."

Harry sighed and hoped he got really sick the day the dragons were to meet with the Queen. That way, he wouldn't be there to take any of the blame.

He turned to the still stunned students and moved forward until he was about ten feet from them. Chekiath, Spath and Selanth followed only a few feet behind him. "Welcome to our Weyr. I'm Harry Potter. I'm a wizard and a dragon rider."

"He is also Weyrleader," announced Spath and dozens of dragons bellowed in agreement.

Harry glanced at the ancient dragon and sketched a simple bow.

"I will try very hard to be worthy of such an honor," he replied softly, then he turned his attention back to the potentials.

"I can hear them in my head," said one student.

"Me, too," whispered Draco. He eyed the dragons with wide eyes and suddenly realized that he had taken a very big step toward finding something that would put his life into perspective.

Harry smirked at the group, seeing their reaction to so many dragons. He had to admit that they were an imposing sight, but this stasis surprised him.

When May and Hermione finally stepped out of the hanger and walked up to different dragons, it was enough for the group to move forward.

"She's beautiful," Lisa Turpin murmured, caressing behind Chekiath's eye ridges.

"She?" exclaimed Chekiath slightly affronted, "I am a male. Tell her, Harry!"

Harry chuckled. "He's also a pig when he eats," he added affectionately. "But he's all male, Lisa." That broke the ice further and the group slowly broke apart, as the students turned to different dragons.

"He's still beautiful," Lisa Turpin murmured. She never imagined being so close to a dragon before and to think they were intelligent. It boggled her mind.

"Harry says we're just funny looking people," Chekiath said. "We don't look like humans, but we think and know who we are. Harry thinks all thinking creatures are people, even his little elf, Dobby, who is a nice friend of mine. He knows how to use his magic to scratch my wing joints just right!"

Several of the potentials turned to eye Harry, who stood off to one side looking fondly at Chekiath. His comments had been heard by all and Chekiath was proud that his rider saw things the way he did.

Harry watched the students turn back to the dragons with obvious relief, then he felt a hand on his shoulder. He turned to see Sir Robert beaming at him.

"Bloody marvelous flying, Harry. It quite took my breath away. I think we never realized the power behind the dragons til now. It's one thing to deal with them one on one. But to see them up in the air flying in formation? Amazing!"

"It really was, Harry," added James as he joined them. "I can't think of a more beautiful way of introducing dragons to our potentials. Look at them now."

Harry turned back to see people pairing off and having conversations with dragons. Despite the cold weather and the brisk wind that swept across the tarmac, no one seemed interested in returning to the warm hangar.

"I wish I had video taped it," Sir Robert said sadly. "I can't think of a better way of introducing dragons to people. And to see them in the air is a majestic sight."

Harry looked at the old man and nodded. "We can do it again for the Queen, if you want."

The old man blinked and smiled broadly. A demonstration like that for the Queen and the PM would be a wonderful thing!

"Let's get them back inside. We still have a lot of ground to cover," Harry said, then he turned to Spath.

Spath looked at Harry, then he trumpeted loudly. "It is time to return to the big building," he called to everyone.

The potentials reluctantly moved back towards the hangar, but they weren't alone. Several dragons followed them inside.

Lord Mills paused and waited until everyone was inside before he flicked the switch to make the doors close. The hangar had pressure sensitive pads so that dragons could open and close the doors, but for now they'd close the doors and let the room warm up again.

Harry climbed up on the stage and unzipped his flight jacket before turning to the others. He pulled off his gloves and goggles and stuffed them into a pocket. May and Hermione, as well as several of the Hogwarts girls, were now seeing Harry in an entirely different light.

"Each of you have the potential to become a dragon rider. Being a rider means more than being able to fly around. In the coming days I'll be teaching you dragon care with help from the others and you'll learn what it means to be a rider.

"In ten days time, we'll move everyone from here to our Hatching Weyr in Greenland. For now, we'll spend the time learning about dragons, their true history and about being riders. That's the good

news. The bad news is that sometime in the next month or so we'll also start organized classes.

"For those of you who are not magical, you'll simply pick up where you left off. But for the magical students, you will have some muggle subjects to study. In the meantime, if the magical folk would come up here, Professor Lupin will remove the tracking charms from your wands," Harry said.

He spotted Sirius motioning to him from a nearby door and he nodded with a slight frown and wondered what the problem was. Sirius looked worried. He shot a glance at James, who understood. He stepped up to help direct the potentials, while Harry went to join Sirius.

Curious, Hermione followed him.

"What's the problem, Sirius?" Harry asked uneasily. He didn't want to leave the potentials when they might have questions that only he could answer.

"Harry, Albus Dumbledore is in your office. He's here asking for sanctuary," Sirius said tensely.

Harry blinked and looked at Sirius, who took a step backwards. "I'm not kidding this time, Harry."

"It's true. Dumbledore did show up with Fawkes, Harry," Hermione added from behind him.

"Bugger it all, just what we need," Harry swore. "Sirius, get James, Katherine and Mister Granger, and meet me in my office. Tell Remus to get the potentials settled. Hermione, I take it you're coming along?"

She nodded and nibbled on her lip. She wanted to chastise him for his language, but he was in what she had taken to calling Weyrleader mode.

"Fine, let's go," he said, then took off at a fast stride with Hermione practically running to keep up.

Harry opened the door and surprised Hermione by holding it open for her, before entering his quarters. Albus Dumbledore sat at a chair in front of Harry's desk. Like his bedroom, one wall of the office opened into the Weyr space for Chekiath and he wasn't surprised to find the large door opening to allow Chekiath passage inside.

Harry sat tiredly and looked over his desk at Dumbledore. "What's happened? No, wait til the others get here. Would you like some tea? Or something to eat, perhaps?"

"Tea would be wonderful," Albus said in reply. This was a different Harry from the one he knew. He seemed more sure of himself.

"Dobby?"

The little elf appeared with a pop and looked at Harry expectantly. "Would you fetch us some tea, and maybe some sandwiches?"

Dobby nodded and vanished only to reappear a moment later with a tray loaded with sandwiches and a large tea urn.

The door opened and Sirius filed in with the others close behind. Once they were all settled, Harry motioned to Dumbledore. "You were about to explain what happened," he prompted.

Dumbledore nodded and placed his tea down on Harry's desk. "Thanks in part to the crisis surrounding dragons, as well as Minister Fudge's growing paranoia, my positions within government and within Hogwarts were slowly being eroded. Barely a week ago I was attacked by several men I didn't recognize. They claimed there were going to arrest me, but I knew they weren't aurors, nor were the spells they were throwing of the type you would use to subdue a wizard.

"I had heard rumors that the Ministry was trying to assemble a force of wizards who weren't part of the DMLE or DoM. To what purpose, I don't know, but I suspect they are seriously thinking they can raise an army.

"As for myself, I was lightly injured in the attack and managed to get away, but then realized the best thing to do was leave Hogwarts when the students did. That would focus the Ministry's attention on me, thinking I had something to do with their disappearance. In one

capacity or another, I have worked at the school for nearly sixty years, so trust me when I say it was not a decision I made lightly."

Albus sighed heavily. "To be honest, I wasn't sure where to go when I left Hogwarts, but Fawkes suggested I come to you. I don't know why he suggested it, but if nothing else, you have ten of my students who will still require instruction."

He looked at Harry and smiled for a moment. "No, not ten. Twelve actually, counting you and Miss Granger."

"So you were once in one of the highest political positions of that Ministry and now you're on the run?" exclaimed James.

Dumbledore looked over at the man with a puzzled expression.

"Ah, Albus Dumbledore, please meet Lord James Mills, member of Parliament, and one of the key people helping us deal with the Muggle Government," Sirius said, "You already know Mister Granger, Hermione's father, and Captain Katherine Atkins of the British Army. She's in charge of our Weyr security."

Albus arched an eyebrow, then he turned back to Harry. "I fear that if the Ministry finds this place, they will attack here."

"We know," Katherine said quietly. "Plans are in the works to start bringing in people who can help with that."

Harry turned a hard gaze on her. "And you didn't think it was important enough to inform me?" he asked.

Katherine blanched. "No, it's not that, Harry. I was going to tell you before they arrived, but it's taking a lot of time to find the right people and get them trained. I don't know the specifics, but I know we started looking for wizards who had left your world and came back into mine. We found them, a lot of them, in all walks of life, but finding people that suited our needs was a different story. By the end of next month, we'll have a new platoon in the company, made up of muggle born wizards and witches. We'll then start training the rest of the company to work with them and to fight against magic."

Harry's frown deepened, "That's well and dandy, but aurors could apparate to any spot in the Weyr. They could also come in via

broom. What they won't do is assault the front gates by pulling up in a bus and unloading in front of you."

"I would be happy to help put up an anti-apparation ward, Harry," Albus offered. "Unfortunately, this place is too big to put under a Fidelius charm, but we could make it unplottable. That would make it more difficult to find."

"Thank you, sir. Please talk to Remus about getting that set up. I'm ashamed to admit I didn't think of it myself," Harry said gratefully, then he turned to Sirius. "I want you to talk to Norendrath. Let's get an air patrol above the Weyr around the clock. Five airborne dragons ought to see anyone flying in and give us enough warning. When we have the riders, we'll mount a rider driven patrol, but for now, unmounted dragons will do."

Sirius nodded. "I'll get it going. But Harry, you can't be expected to do or think of everything. Remember that."

"I think you've done enough for today, Harry. The Weyr is protected and we still have all those potential riders to deal with," offered Dan.

Harry nodded reluctantly. "Probably," he muttered, then he turned his attention back to Albus. "Sir, I'm sorry about what happened to you, but welcome to our Weyr. Don't be surprised if some of our muggle folk come to you to ask about the Ministry, now that you're here. You're the best we have in understand how they think."

Dan stood and stretched. "I'll see the Headmaster to comfortable quarters," he offered.

Harry nodded and the others filed from his office. He sighed and took off his glasses so he could wipe at his face.

"Why would they raise an army?" he asked aloud.

"I would think it was obvious," Hermione replied. "You have an army because you intend to attack someone."

He blinked and fumbled for his glasses, then he turned to her in surprise. He hadn't noticed she had remained behind.

She looked at him archly. "Well? Isn't that what you would use an army for?"

Harry nodded slowly, then he glanced up at a large map of the United Kingdom on his wall. "Yes, but attack who? They aren't stupid enough to attack the mug..."

He sucked in a deep breath and scowled thunderously, then he whirled on Hermione.

She bit back a squeak at his look and the magic he seemed to be unconsciously generating.

"Who has dragons still? Who have we studied about that have been at war with the wizards dozens of times?"

"Goblins?" she exclaimed.

"Goblins," he repeated, then his eyes glazed over.

"Polenth?"

Hermione repressed a shiver as she watched him. It seemed almost as if he were no longer in the room. His body was there, but she knew he was holding a private conversation with a distant dragon.

"Weyrleader?" Polenth was surprised by his call.

"Is all well?"

"The Goblins are proving to be very cooperative, now that they understand we're not mindless beasts."

"I am worried, Polenth. Not about Goblin treachery, but about the wizards attacking the Goblins in an attempt to get at your clan."

"What do you suggest, Weyrleader? You know we cannot leave the caverns."

"No, you can't come into the open, but you can go to other caverns and to other closed in dark places. I will prepare a place at Disko you could retreat to, if necessary. For now, be watchful."

"We will, Weyrleader, and thank you." replied Polenth.

Harry's eyes returned to normal and he blinked a few times. "Another thing to worry about," he said softly, then he went over to his desk and made a note in a small book.

"Are you all right?" Hermione asked softly.

He sighed and sat back down on his chair. "I'm fine, just tired," he replied and looked up at her. "May's going to need your help in the dorm tonight."

She nodded and started to reach to him, then pulled back. "Try to get some sleep."

"I will," he said, then he turned back to one of the books on his desk.

She chewed on her lip for a moment longer, then reluctantly left the room.

Minerva McGonagall's Quarters, Hogwarts, February 2nd...

It was two o'clock in the morning when Clarence appeared in Minerva's bedroom. The hat swiveled around for a moment, then spotted Minerva sound asleep on her bed. It hovered closer and came to rest on her head, where it glowed for a moment.

The hat was erasing certain memories to protect her. It had already dealt with Poppy, who Albus had foolishly explained some of his plans to. Now it was Minerva's turn.

There was no maliciousness involved. Hogwarts decided that no one should know where Albus had gone to or why. Minerva now just knew that he had spoken about having to go away for a while and would be back soon. Even a legilimency probe or Veritaserum wouldn't produce a different answer to where Albus had gone.

She was aware that the Hat was helping control the wards while he was gone and knew that only the hat could pick another Headmaster if he never returned.

The hat lifted off her head and she mumbled in her sleep, then turned over. Silently, the hat hovered for a moment longer, then vanished from the room.

Minister's office, Ministry of Magic, February 5th...

"Sir, Madam Umbridge is here to speak with you," said Percy Weasley.

"Excellent! Send her in!" he replied, then he straightened his robes slightly.

Percy held the door opened and smiled at Delores as she moved past him. Seeing the Minister give him a nod, he closed the door and carefully cast a privacy charm on it.

A crystal lit up on Fudge's desk, indicating the room was now secure. "Delores, what the hell is going on down at the DMLE? I mean, Amelia is claiming that the missing students left on their own with no help and now Dumbledore is missing?"

Delores sighed. "I'm not sure, to be honest, Cornelius. Amelia is still investigating, but so far, it looks like Dumbledore went off on his own, and the students left of their own free will. In fact, the old man was seen in the castle after the students had left to go to Hogsmeade. As a precaution, I've asked Amelia to put a warrant out for Dumbledore, but the only thing she's willing to do right now is a 'detain for questioning' warrant."

Fudge nodded unhappily. "Yes, Madam Bones is becoming a liability, I'm afraid."

He shook his head slightly and turned back to Delores. "Right then, what about assembling a force to take over the Goblins?"

Delores smiled broadly. "I've managed to assemble quite a group, all from impeccable families. Some of them were the unfortunate victims of You-Know-Who's Imperius spell, but that's turning out to be in our favor. They remember the spells we're going to need and are very willing to teach the others in their use."

Fudge nodded sagely. "How many do you have so far?"

"Not counting Amelia's people, we have nearly one hundred. I'm hoping that you'll allow me to recruit a little more formally, like at Hogwarts."

Fudge frowned. "I don't know, Delores. Let me think on that. It's a secret for now, but you recruiting from the school is bound to become widespread news. It wouldn't do to tip off the Goblins, now would it?" he asked.

Umbridge looked at him in surprise. She hadn't expected a problem with her request, but more to the point, she hadn't expected that he could see a possible problem that she hadn't. It surprised her, and it raised her estimate of Fudge's acumen in her mind. He was smarter than he acted.

"How many do you think you're going to need, Delores?" Fudge asked.

"I'm hoping for five hundred to a thousand, Minister. While those animals may outnumber, us a thousand wizards casting killing curses will beat them into submission," she replied.

Fudge nodded. "Yes, I can see that. Let me consider the issue of recruiting. That's something we need to deal with most carefully. Some of the people you want to recruit are sole heirs of important families and the Wizengamot is not going to like us putting them in danger."

She nodded a bit unhappily, but she could see his point.

"Anything else?" he asked.

"Sir, I'm still worried about the missing children. While some of them are just muggle born and they probably ran back to their own world, I can't see an upstanding child like Draco Malfoy, or even Millicent Bulstrode, running away. Both had everything they ever wanted. Lucius is outraged at the mere suggestion. And when Amelia suggested that perhaps Draco and Millicent ran away together, Lucius nearly challenged her to a duel.

"He can't deny that such things have happened to pureblood children in the past. And as much as I wanted to smack her down, she isn't actively involved in the case, since her own ward is also

missing. All she was doing was offering possibilities based on her experiences."

Fudge nodded unhappily. He didn't like it when Lucius was unhappy. An unhappy Lucius meant a Lucius with closed pockets.

"I'll speak with her. Perhaps it's time for her to take some time off," Fudge murmured.

Delores nodded happily and stood. "Thank you, Cornelius."

He smiled and waved, then he touched the crystal with his wand, signaling to Weasley to release the privacy charm on the room.

Campbeltown Weyr, Hangar #2, February 5th...

Harry stepped into the large building, followed by Chekiath. The potentials looked up from their seats and a hush fell among them. They were still somewhat in awe of the dragons.

A line of dragons followed Chekiath into the room and Harry waited until they were all inside before closing the hangar doors.

"At the table you will find buckets and a wire brush," He called loudly. "Each of you is to take one of each, then walk over to where Mister Granger is standing. If you know how to use the tap, fill your bucket until it's roughly half full with heated oil. If you do not know how to use the tap, ask Mister Granger and he'll show you how it works."

Harry then walked over to the table and picked up a bucket and brush. He grinned at Dan before filling his own bucket and walked back over to Chekiath.

"Once you have a bucket of oil, find yourself a dragon and go introduce yourself to him or her," he called.

Ten minutes later, the students were all watching Harry. "None of these dragons have reached maturity, so they are still growing. Part of our job is to ensure that the dragons remain healthy, and one way we do that is by inspecting and oiling their scales and hide."

He walked over to Chekiath and the dragon obediently turned sideways so he could demonstrate. "First, look for obvious problems,

such as a misaligned scale or a scale bulging up to expose the sensitive hide underneath. If you find such a spot, then your dragon is down checked for flight Between.

"We're not sure why, but we do know from the dragons, and from experience, that going Between while injured or sick can make the problem worse. So any injury needs to be dealt with as soon as it's spotted."

He ran his hand over Chekiath's flank, letting the students see, and copy his movements.

Thirty minutes later, he finished his lecture and each dragon turned slightly and gave a very small burst of dragon flame to reheat the oil, then the students began rubbing down their dragons with the stiff brushes. The room filled with the sound of dragons crooning with pleasure and small chatter broke out among the students.

Chekiath looked at the students with a bit of longing and Harry laughed. "You had your turn this morning after our run."

"I know, but I enjoy a good brushing," replied Chekiath.

"Maybe later. Right now I need to see how the others are doing," Harry replied, shaking his head.

Chekiath rumbled with draconic laughter and curled up in his spot, while he watched Harry make his rounds of the students.

Harry had visited with nearly a dozen students when he heard a voice call his name.

"Excuse me? Mister Potter?"

He turned and saw Karen Khan, one of the muggle students, waving to him. Curious, he walked over.

"It's just Harry, Karen. Mister Potter makes me feel downright old and I know for a fact you're a couple months older than I am."

The oriental girl flushed slightly and nodded. "I'm sorry, but I'm a little concerned. Tikreth here has a badly aligned scale and I think she's developing an infection."

Harry frowned and nodded. "Show me."

She led him around to one side. "Tikreth, would you lift your wings please?"

Harry examined the scale and the darkening hide underneath. "You're right, Karen. That was a good catch. Hopefully we caught it early enough."

He patted Tikreth's flank and she lowered her wings. She turned her large head toward him, her eyes, slightly yellow tinged, whirled slowly.

"I'm sorry, Tikreth, but I want you to see Hagrid as soon as possible. In the meantime, no Between until he clears you. If you want, Karen will help you with this."

"Thank you, Weyrleader. I would like her help. She has a very gentle touch."

The girl blushed brightly, but Harry ignored that. He was more concerned about the impending infection.

"Hagrid is in the infirmary now. Why don't you take Tikreth over there and get him to look at her?" he asked, turning back to the girl.

She nodded again and he smiled. "That was a really tough spot, Karen. Finding it when you did probably saved Tikreth a great deal of pain," he said kindly, then he patted her on the shoulder.

She turned away, then motioned to Tikreth, who followed her to the doors.

Harry watched the pair for a moment longer. Hearing his name, he turned to Gordon Chapman, another of the muggles, who had a question about the oil being used.

May turned away from watching over the back of her dragon and looked at Hermione, who was now looking at her. Both had watched Harry dealing with Karen, who was very pretty. He hadn't seemed to notice.

"He just doesn't understand, does he?" May said softly.

"No," Hermione replied with a bit of a sigh. "He's downright dense at times."

May suddenly looked appalled and she leaned a little closer to Hermione. "Do you think he may be gay?"

Hermione blinked, then couldn't help herself. She started to snigger. Slowly May started to laugh as well.

"Something funny ladies?" asked Harry from behind them.

Both girls stopped laughing abruptly and blushed terribly. "No, Harry, every thing is fine," replied Hermione

Harry nodded. "Make sure you check under the wing joints. Karen found a bad scale on Tikreth and I had to send them to Hagrid. She's going to need antibiotics to fight off the infection that's starting to set in."

Both girls nodded, and Harry turned and walked away.

"He's not gay," hissed Hermione to May, causing her to break into another fit of giggles.

Harry paused in the center of the large room when he spotted Dumbledore walking towards him, a smile on his face.

"Good morning, Headmaster," he said.

"Harry," Dumbledore chided, "I'm no longer your Headmaster. In fact, given the informal nature of the Weyr, I wouldn't mind if you called me Albus."

"That's going to take getting used to, sir," Harry said softly.

"Try it, Harry. You might find it gets easier with repetition."

"I'll try... Albus."

Albus grinned widely and clapped him on his shoulder. "I have to admit that I was watching you this morning. My boy, you had all the

makings of a fine teacher. You have just the right amount of patience with the potentials and you're not afraid to give praise where it's due. That young girl practically glowed under your praise."

Harry ducked his head in embarrassment and Dumbledore chuckled lightly. "I also noted that you are making your magical students do the same work as the muggles, in the same manner," he added in a lower voice. "Not that you need it, but I approve! Magic might make their lives easier, but they need to learn how to do this the normal way so that they can appreciate any shortcuts they develop later in life."

"That was my idea as well, sir... er... Albus."

Both men looked up when Sirius entered the hangar. He approached them with a very somber expression on his face.

"I need you to come with me to the security office," he said.

"Both of us?"

Sirius nodded. "Yes, this concerns all of us."

Harry nodded, then he turned to the students. "Hermione, May!" he called. Both girls looked up, then put down their brushes and jogged over to him.

"You both know how important this is. I need to go for a bit. Circulate and help the others," he said. When they nodded, he turned and caught up with Sirius and Albus, who were walking toward the door.

"I wonder what that's all about?" asked May.

"I'm sure we'll find out later," Hermione replied, then she nudged the other girl. "Come on, let's go see if anyone needs help."

Sirius stopped the pair at the door to the security office. "Remember, no magic in here," he warned, then he opened the door. Sir Robert, Lord Mills and Captain Atkins sat grimly waiting for the two to enter.

"Good, you're here," Lord Mills said without preamble. "Now, Captain, if you would roll that tape?"

She nodded. "We got this from the PM's office this morning. It's a hidden video of the PM's office. They use cameras like this to monitor the PM's well being. Normally, the night crew does a quick review of these tapes, then they wipe them so they can be reused the next day. But they spotted something unusual last night. This copy was hand delivered to Sir Robert very early this morning.

"Yesterday, the PM was supposed to meet with the Minister for Magic. This is what they recorded," Atkins said, then she hit play.

It was an extremely short clip in which a man who was not Minister Fudge obliterated the Prime Minister, then when the security folks rushed into the room from their station, weapons drawn, two other men appeared and obliterated them, as well.

"The Prime Minister was shown the video this morning, and needless to say, he was outraged by what he saw. As far as he recalls, he had a very pleasant meeting with Fudge yesterday, in which quite a lot was accomplished and he was convinced that the Wizarding Government was working hard to ensure it followed muggle laws, as well as their own," Lord Mills added.

"I didn't recognize any of those men," Harry said. "All I can say for sure was Fudge wasn't among them."

Albus heaved a heavy sigh. "I recognized them and it is far worse than I thought. All three of those men belong to Minister Fudge's personal body guard. I knew Fudge only paid lip service to the Prime Minister. It was a common thing for the Minister of Magic to ignore the muggles for the most part, but I never thought he'd resort to bespelling the man."

Lord Mills turned to Albus with an outraged expression. "Just what is it with you people that makes you think you're above the laws of this nation?" he demanded.

Albus flinched back from Lord Mills slightly. "My lord, you must understand that having magic tends to make a person look down on those who do not. I am not advocating the belief, but it's a commonly held idea.

"We are all people, but like any people we want to think we are better than others. That we're special. We have magic and our life

spans are longer than yours by as much as double or longer. The wizarding world believes that makes them special and they fail to see the accomplishments of the rest of the world. If you would tell a wizard that the muggles had walked on the moon, or split the atom, he'd laugh at the idea of walking on the moon, ask what an atom was."

Harry looked startled by something and was staring at the floor.

"Harry?" Sirius said, touching his shoulder.

He blinked and looked at him. "I'm sorry, Sirius. I'm just surprised, I guess. I didn't know about that live longer business at all."

Dumbledore shook his head ruefully. "We forget that your Aunt and Uncle wouldn't tell you these things. Your parents would have explained it all to you. And I know Minerva took it upon herself to explain to the muggle born girls. I just assumed that Professor Flitwick would have done the same for the muggle born boys. Being wizard born, you may have been overlooked by them, Harry."

"I'll have Remus stop by and tell you about some of the other differences," Sirius said, then he smirked. "It's not as bad as the boy wizard, girl wizard talk."

Harry winced at the thought of that kind of conversation. "Good, I don't need that one. I had health class in school. Now, I'll let you discuss the issues about the Prime Minister. I have a class waiting on me."

Harry walked from the room, while the others watched him depart.

"I would have thought he'd want to know what is going on," commented James.

"He does," Sirius replied, "But he knows he's not a fully trained wizard and really can't add much to the conversation. If it involves his dragons, he'll be there, giving orders like we've all seen him do. But he knows where his limits lie and this is one of them."

"I'm curious," Captain Atkins said. "Just what are the differences between wizards and normal humans?"

Sirius smirked. "Are you sure you really want to know?"

"Sirius," Dumbledore chided, then turned to Atkins. "My dear, how old would you say I am?"

She frowned and looked at Dumbledore appraisingly. "Perhaps seventy? Maybe seventy five?"

He smiled at her. "Why thank you, child. I haven't been in my seventies since the 1920s. I was born in 1843 and probably have at least another thirty or forty years still in me. A wizard's life span is tied directly to his or her power. Sirius, who is a powerful wizard, could easily live to be a hundred and forty or more. Harry, who is stronger at his age than I was, could surpass even I, since he's still growing in his powers.

"Another difference is that wizards are less prone to injury. Throw a wizard out of a window five or six stories high and they will bounce and perhaps break an arm or two. That same wizard will heal faster than a muggle, even if just muggle medical techniques are used.

"Because magic seems to keep us fit, most wizards tend to shy away from physical activity, but those that do are fitter than the best muggle athletes. There have been a few instances where wizards slipped into your Olympics and swept their events because they were fitter than they looked. Usually, we'd find out and arrest those people for violating our secrecy laws.

"I noted that you run every morning with Harry. It took him, what? A few days to get used to running that distance?"

Katherine Atkins blinked and nodded suddenly. "It did! I thought it was just because he was already in decent shape for that level of exercise."

"My godson hasn't been in decent shape since he was one year old," Sirius growled with an angry look at Dumbledore.

Dumbledore sighed and nodded. "Yes, and I do regret that very much, Sirius. But he'll never return to those people again."

Lord Mills and Captain Atkins exchanged a look. They knew the story of Harry's impression and knew some of his history. They also knew there was a lot being left unsaid.

Hoping to change the subject, Katherine jumped in before Sirius could vent his anger. "So, are those the only differences?"

Dumbledore blushed lightly. "Well, there are other differences. The magic is a dominant trait, so a wizard or witch mating with a normal person is still likely to have magical children. And unless that couple use magical birth controls, no muggle birth control will prevent a pregnancy. It's also said that a wizard or witch has greater stamina for the act of love making, but I don't know if anyone has actually done the research on that aspect. It could be a myth."

Sirius nodded and smiled knowingly.

Captain Atkins glanced at him with an arched eyebrow, then looked away.

"There is a lot to be said for the differences that seem to make wizards better than muggles. On the other hand, when we do get sick, we tend to get very, very ill. Some illnesses can cause us to lose control over our magic, damaging ourselves and our surroundings. Most wizards go into seclusion during their final years, as the effects of old age are greater on wizards than on muggles. Dementia and other age related ailments proceed at a rapid pace until we die. The only consolation is that, until those symptoms appear, we can continue living a normal life."

He paused and thought for a moment. "No, I think the worst difference is the heart break a witch or wizard feels when they marry a muggle and that person finally passes away. A wizard's magic will extend the life of their spouse, but it can never fully match their own. So when a spouse who is not magical dies, the surviving spouse is left knowing that he or she is alone and will be alone for another thirty or more years. We rarely remarry."

"Some of us don't see that as a burden, Albus," Sirius said softly. If there was one lesson he had learned from James and Lily it was that love was the most important thing, and that the time together wasn't as important as the love shared.

"No, some don't, Sirius, but it is both a blessing and a curse. Which is why we try to tell our students to look among their own kind for a spouse," replied the old man.

James looked uncomfortable, "All right, I realize that Harry should be told these things, but what about the Prime Minister?"

"Have him cancel his future appointments with Fudge for now. Send a message saying there's a scheduling conflict or something and that he'll sent a new date when it's been straightened out. He doesn't meet every week, does he?"

"No, only six times a year," replied James.

Albus and Sirius exchanged relieved looks. "That gives us plenty of time if they won't meet for another two months. If necessary, I'll borrow Harry's invisibility cloak and be in that office to protect the Prime Minister myself, but I think we'll have some magical protections in place by then, right, Katherine?" asked Albus.

She nodded. "Yes. We have a number of people being trained for such positions right now. We were lucky. We found several members of the metro police who are also wizards. It's just a matter of training them to be part of the diplomatic protection group."

"How did those other two men appear?" asked Lord Mills.

"They could have been there. Since I didn't hear the pop of an apparation, I am going to assume they were disillusioned and in the room when the meeting began," Albus replied.

"Apparation makes a popping sound," Sirius explained. "People like Albus here can do it and are nearly silent, but most wizards make a distinct noise when they apparate."

"Can we add some magical protections to the Ministers office?" asked James.

"Indeed we can, just like we're adding here," Albus said. "I would be happy to put some wards up."

Lord Mills stood and turned to Albus, "Let's go over to my office and see if we can arrange a visit to the PM's office. Then maybe you can teach some of the people we're training to do the same thing."

Sirius watched them depart and smiled. "He's feeling a bit lost, I'm afraid, which is why he jumps at every chance to make himself useful," he said.

"I'm sorry?" asked Katherine.

He turned back to her. "Dumbledore. He's used to being at the center of things. Now he's been pushed off to one side and has little to do, so he's jumping at any chance to make himself useful."

She nodded, then turned back to a topic that was bothering her. "Sirius, about this life span thing. You seemed to disagree with Dumbledore about it."

Sirius shrugged. "Albus Dumbledore is a great many things and he is often right. But he's never been married, and as far as I know, never been in love. I have to admit that I'm not much better in that regard, but I learned a very important fact from Harry's parents. The time you have to together doesn't matter when the couple are in love. James and Lily loved each other very much, and while it's a shame they couldn't have more time, the time they did have was filled with love and laughter. I think that's more important.

"As far as a wizard or witch marrying a muggle, the magic will enhance the life span of the non-magical partner. You can expect a good thirty or forty years with your partner, Katherine, but if he were magical, that number rises sixty or seventy years, barring illness or accident. That's a very long time, even by wizard standards."

"Remus will tell Harry about the life span issue and muggles, but he'll also tell him to go with his heart. I've noticed him checking out the girls from both groups, but I think he's refraining from any entanglements until the Weyr is better situated."

"Yes, I've noticed that about him. He seems very focused on the dragons and somewhat oblivious to the girls around him," she replied.

Sirius made a sour face. "Part of that is his upbringing, I'm sure. He refuses to really talk about what life was like with his Aunt and Uncle, but I know Petunia. It couldn't have been very good."

Sirius stood and stretched a little, "All this talking is getting on my nerves. I think I'll go check on the air patrol and maybe join Norendrath for a couple hours of keeping watch."

Katherine Atkins watched him walk from her office, then she shook her head. He's a strange man, she thought. One moment he's enjoying the silliest of pranks, then suddenly intense and serious, to the point of being frightening.

The second most important Weyr to be established was originally called the Campbeltown Weyr. That name was ultimately replaced, as it became apparent that it was the key location for any government to go to in order to open talks with the dragons within their territories. Now it's named Spath's Weyr, after the dragon elder who helped bring humans and riders together. The Weyrleader insisted on honoring his friend by renaming the Weyr after Spath passed Between.

Excerpt from The Weyrs of Earth by Remus John Lupin, published in 2040.

Author's Notes, Christmas Wish List and Mockeries:

- And now the stage is set for the first group of Dragon Riders on Earth. May and Hermione are friends despite being somewhat in competition. Unfortunately for them, the field now has many more fillies eying the prize. Heh.. something for the shippers to gnaw on.

- To the reviewer that wrote about Flaming Fart Ron. Ummm are you sure you were reviewing the right story. I mean yeah we kicked Ron from the story early, but he doesn't have a flatulence problem here. Although there was the night I had too many Baked Beans. Poor Alyx thought Yosemite had erupted.

- Meer-Heika, it will please you to know that of the 605 reviews at the time of your review, NO ONE had the balls to say HERE BE DRAGONS until you. Now four hundred and seventeen people have pm'd me with that damn phrase. Someone parked a Semi truck on my front lawn with that phrase painted on the sides. And there's a

group of World War II era airplanes skywriting it over my house! Damn you! Alyx thinks its funny, but she thinks strapping explosives to small children before sending them home is funny too. I'm sending my Psychiatrist bill to you.

- Even at this state in the story, there are inklings of things to come. We've had a few people wondering where the epic battles were. Some others claim that the dragons are uber powered. They may appear to be uber powered compared to a modern military, but they are not invincible or invulnerable. Things are happening, but they are happening at a slow pace. The weyrs cannot be set up over night even with support from the muggle Government. Harry is still searching for ways to make dragons useful to society without endangering his dragons. Its not going to happen overnight. All I can say is have patience grasshoppers.

- The Ministry is neither stupid nor filled with silly people. What they are is simple. They are people that are convinced of their superiority. It is the same reason why we had WWII and nearly every war since then and an uncommonly common human flaw in all of us. How many times have you had someone effectively say either in words or actions, "I'm right and nothing you say or do will convince me otherwise." That my friends is what I've always envisioned as the Ministry of Magic.

- Only a very small percentage of people had any problem with the concept of the Goblins winning their rebellions. I get the impression that the goblins are not especially war like unlike pressed against the wall and then they can win by fielding overwhelming force. Once they get what they want, its back to business as usual for them. Finally I can't help but point out that they hold control over the economy. We didn't ask Germany and Japan to take over our treasury after we beat them in WWII, we didn't ask Russia to do that during the cold war... So honestly, how else would an enemy nation get control of something so important if they didn't wrest control by force? Think about it, but don't hurt yourselves.

- BJH if you think Harry and Hermione are fully reconciled at this point think again. Hermione has yet to discover that she's no longer dealing with Harry Potter. And it will be worse for her after she gets her dragon. There will be no easy road for Hermione, or Harry. Besides the generic pitfalls of being teenagers and all those years involved, you also have to deal with dragons and their bondings

AND the fact that Harry's bond isn't the same as the other riders. Bumpy road ahead, reduce speed and keep your hands inside the car at all times!

- Breven if you get fired reading our story at work, please don't blame us. We did warn you. Oh. One other thing. It'll cost you a box of donuts to keep us from emailing your boss about your reading fan fiction. Chocolate donuts, and none of that coconut sprinkle stuff... ugh.

- Ohm7515. Sorry, but if you're expecting Harry to pull out an uzi and hose down the crowd, you're reading the wrong story. People are people and even the strongest people have times of weakness.

Standard Disclaimer:

Bob paced the floor, ten steps, turn, ten steps, turn. "Think think think," he muttered.

Alyx stomped into the room, over her shoulder was an axe dripping blood and guts.

Bob stopped pacing, he eyed the axe carefully.

"Don't ask," she growled. "I was just solving a problem with noisy neighbors."

Bob nodded, still staring at the gore covered axe. Was that a lollipop stuck to the axe handle? He wondered.

"So what's your problem this time?"

"What do you think?" Bob replied, "the disclaimer again. The same problem we have with every chapter Pinky! I had this great idea to tell people that we don't own Harry Potter or the Dragon Riders of Pern and that we're merely playing in those universes."

"So? Sounds about right?"

Bob glared at her and she flinched. "Yeah my bad, we never do right. So what's the problem."

"Well I took the statement of 'we don't own Harry Potter or the Dragon Riders of Pern. We're merely playing in those universes.' And I entered them into an online translator. I converted them to Dutch, then to Danish which is almost like a donut, then back to English," Bob said shaking his head in dismay.

"What did you get?" asked Alyx eagerly, bouncing on her toes and spraying the audience with bits and pieces of her neighbors.

"Vi don't private Harry Fiddle with whether the Pilot Extension piece by Pern. Vi is by oneself play to they all," Bob proclaimed grandly.

Alyx blinked. "How can you say that without laughing?"

Bob smirked at her. "Put your axe away and get into your Nurse's outfit while I start the story then I'll explain."

The history of dragons is inexplicably entwined with muggle mythology. Despite our best efforts, dragons have been seen, and even rarely slain, by muggles. The famous Saint George, who the muggles venerate, was actually a medieval adventurer who accidentally killed a dragon when his horse broke into a full gallop while he fumbled with his lance. The poor chap catapulted himself when he struck the beast and he landed so hard he didn't remember what happened. It is unfortunate that the obliviate spell was unknown at that time, as he recovered his memory a month later and told his tale, thus starting the legend of Saint George.

Excerpt from *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find them* by Newt Scamander. Published 1927.

Campbeltown Weyr, Girls Dormitory, Evening of February 5th...

Hermione entered the girls dormitory area and smiled, seeing all the girls were sitting around their lounge area. The Weyr had a common social hall used by everyone and each of the dormitories had a much smaller lounge area for relaxing. Unsurprisingly, the girls and boys were forbidden from entering the dorm areas of their opposites.

A radio played music softly in the background but she didn't recognize the band. That didn't surprise her, as she didn't listen to music very often.

The group of girls in the lounge were a far cry from the girls of Gryffindor. The biggest differences, in her opinion, was that they were a lot smarter than most of her former roommates and boys didn't figure in as their prime topic of conversation at any given time. Boys were a favorite topic, but not the one constant topic like the Gryffindor Girls dorm.

In fact, the first night the girls had stayed up late debating whether or not Tolkien of Lord of the Rings fame was influenced by dragons or not. His Smaug in 'The Hobbit' seemed to be very similar to Pern standard dragons, except that Smaug could speak very well and no dragon really had the ability for vocal speech.

May looked up and smiled brightly, seeing Hermione step into the room. "Well? What did you find out?"

She grimaced. "It seems that yesterday the Prime Minister was supposed to have his usual meeting with the Minister of Magic. Instead, he ended up getting bespelled. The Minister of Magic never bothered to show up. They wouldn't have even known about it, but the meeting was video taped."

"They can't get away with that!" exclaimed Georgia Porter.

Hermione nodded. "They won't. According to what I heard tonight, the Prime Minister is outraged at this, but things need to happen before he can try to straighten this out."

Millicent shook her head. "I don't understand what is going on. Why have we been told for so long that we're better than the muggles? I haven't been here a full week and I've seen things I find hard to believe." She gestured towards the large color TV that sat silent in a corner. "I just don't understand why they lied to us. The muggles have done so much that we never heard about."

"Milli," Karen Khan said softly, "if you hadn't come here, would you have tried to learn more about the normal world?"

Millicent shook her head. "No, probably not. Until the other day I thought the Wizarding world was superior to yours. Draco says they lie because the truth is too painful for them to admit to."

"It is painful," admitted Luna, who sat cross legged in one corner. Once away from the school, Luna changed radically. She still talked about wild creatures, but now she seemed to do it more for her own amusement and to see what kind of reaction she could get out of people than any real belief. "But it's exciting too. And it's so different here. At Hogwarts, people use to make fun of me, but not here. I feel like I belong here. We all belong here. And for the first time I feel like I have friends."

Lisa Turpin, who sat off to one side, looked away, shamed by her behavior. She had been one of the girls who had picked on Luna for her oddities.

Michelle Smith grinned. "You do have friends, Luna. And I think you being able to do magic is totally awesome."

Luna smiled back at the petite black haired girl. "And I think someday I would like to try riding a dirt bike like you talked about, Michelle."

The two girls grinned at each other and Hermione couldn't help but smile at them.

May turned back to Hermione, "So, was Harry there tonight?" she asked.

Hermione frowned and shook her head.

"He's so intense," Mariah said, "So serious, so..." She trailed off and sighed deeply.

Several of the girls started to laugh and Karen hurled a throw pillow at Mariah. She laughed and caught the pillow, hugging it to herself.

"No, he had gone off to Disko to check on some work there. I think he's deliberately trying to keep away from getting involved in any conflict that pits muggles against wizards," Hermione replied.

"Sooner or later he's going to have to pick a side," Karen declared.

"It's not that easy," replied Luna. "I don't think the dragons will deliberately kill a human."

"That's right," Michelle added. "According to Remus, they were programmed not to kill."

May shook her head. "I think they might, but only on orders from the Weyrleader."

Mariah hummed. "Yes, the Weyrleader." She ducked several more pillows and seat cushions hurled her way.

Those in the room began to laugh again and Hermione relaxed. Looking around, she admitted to herself that this was what she'd expected dorm life to be. They could be as serious or silly as they

wanted, without having to worry about being judged or someone carrying tales they shouldn't.

Campbeltown Weyr, Boys Dormitory, Evening of February 5th...

Draco Malfoy glanced up when Lee Jordan sat down across from him and he hid a frown. Other than Mark Harper, it seemed like there were better girls among the Hogwarts group than the boys.

Draco had a textbook open and was trying to make sense over the concept that the planet had layers. "Why is this stuff even important?" he moaned mostly to himself.

Martin Benson looked up from the paperback he was reading. "Your first exposure to science, right?"

Draco nodded reluctantly.

"Don't sweat it," Martin said. "We all have our weak spots. Me? I hate chemistry and I have to struggle to get anywhere. Unless you're planning on going into a field, you learn what they shove at you and worry about why it's important for the stuff that matters." He pointed to the book. "Basic Earth Sciences is supposed to expose you to a bunch of ideas so that you can get a feel for the various fields involved. More importantly, it's trying to teach you to think logically."

Lee chuckled. "Logic and magic don't mix very well."

Martin put his book down and sat forward on his chair, frowning. "Maybe it doesn't, but we're all here, normal people and you wizards, hoping to become dragon riders. I don't know about you, but honestly, the idea of becoming a dragon rider seems to be even better than being a wizard. And just maybe there's room in your world view for logic if you just let yourself think about it for a bit."

Lee and Draco both nodded in agreement, then looked at each other sheepishly. It was true. They were together in a place hoping to become something more than what they were now.

Campbeltown Weyr, Hangar #2, February 7th...

Harry walked into the hangar space and he smiled broadly at the people facing him. "This is the day you've been waiting for, but before we start I'm going to ask you a few questions. Take your seats and we'll get started."

He waited while everyone sat and looked at him and hoped he wouldn't take too long. They were dressed in their flight suits and eagerly waiting this chance for their first flight on a dragon.

"Hermione, would you please describe hangar seven?" he asked. Hangar seven was the building that Hagrid had converted into a hospital for dragons, so every one of the potentials had been to the building several times. Hermione and May had been there more often than the rest.

Hermione looked startled for a moment. "It's a off white color with a horizontal dark stripe about head height around the whole building. There is a big seven painted on the doors," she said after a moment.

Harry nodded. "May? Describe hangar seven," he said again.

May looked at him like he was daft. "It's an off white with a dark stripe, just like Hermione said."

Harry nodded again. "Luna? Describe hanger seven?"

Luna looked at the other two girls, then she looked back at Harry. "It's off white, but the stripe is a dark brown, almost black in places. The back of the building is more brown than black, and unlike the other hangars, the rear door has a large yellow and black striped painted area in front of it. The number on the door is a bright yellow."

Harry smiled and nodded to her. "When you give a dragon an image to jump Between you must be precise in what you envision. Today, we will be starting your basic flying lessons, but I want each of you to use the opportunity to really look around. Then I want you to consider this carefully."

He paused and looked at Luna, "Luna what would have happened to May and Hermione had they used their original description?"

Luna frowned and looked down for a moment. "I suppose it's possible that they may have emerged from Between someplace totally unexpected."

Harry nodded. "Exactly. Today, we'll begin by flying around the Weyr, but as you do, I want you each to look at things from the perspective of being airborne. Learn to recognize landmarks that you can pass to your dragon. Also, keep a close eye on your dragons. They're yearlings and have not yet reached maturity. That means you can easily overexert yourselves and the dragon.

"I can tell you from personal experience that there is no worse feeling than knowing you brought harm to your dragon," he said in a quiet tone and a number of people shivered in their seats.

"What do you mean?" called Gordon Chapman.

Harry suppressed a frown. Chapman was turning out to be a bit of a problem. He was the oldest candidate and the one that seemed to challenge Harry during nearly every lesson. "Shortly after Momnarth rated Chekiath as being able to fly with me, we went out flying. I wasn't watching him as closely as I should have been. He exhausted himself and we ended up sitting on a rocky beach for several hours while he rested. A dragon will continue to fly even when he's exhausted because he thinks that's what the rider needs. A tired dragon and a tired rider are a danger to each other and to themselves. It's our job to ensure that our dragons do not overextended themselves."

Chapman ignored the glares some of the others gave him, but it was Harry's gaze that caused him to flinch and look away.

He might be nearly four years older than Harry, but Harry wasn't about to give way to this upstart.

"Now, if there are no more questions, we'll go out to meet our rides and start flying."

The Dragon History, Volume Four, Silence falls...

Remus smiled, seeing Spath approach. He wasn't alone. "Good morning, Spath. And good morning to you," he called to Spath and

the unknown dragon. "I'm afraid we no longer have the warm rocks and steam to enjoy while we talk, Spath."

"We will eventually, Wolf. This is Dronth. He comes from a Weyr far to the south, where sands are hot year round. I bespoke to Dronth and asked him to visit today so that he could share with you a very special memory," Spath replied.

Remus bowed slightly. "Then welcome to our Weyr, Dronth, and I thank you for coming."

The large Longhorn eyed Remus for a moment. "For the Weyr, I would do anything," he said slowly. "The Weyrleader woke us from our long slumber. There are no words or deeds that can express our gratitude for what he has given us."

Dronth turned to Spath. "He knows of our bond?"

"He does. He understands how tight it is, and what it means to us, but he does not know of the great silence. I hoped your memory would help him understand."

Dronth nodded, then turned back to Remus. "Sit, Wolf, and let me show you when the age of beasts began."

Remus settled into a chair even as his vision shifted and he was thrust into the memory. He found himself standing on the very edge of an ancient caldera. It was overgrown with huge conifers and giant oaks, but still visible as a volcanic bowl from this high perch. Around the bowl were groups of dragons.

He frowned and noted that they were broken down by breed, although no one breed had reached their modern form yet.

"Sidraneth is but a fading memory now, Wolf," Dronth said. "There have been uncounted turns upon turns since then."

He turned in surprise and looked at the Dragon. Spath never accompanied him in these trips into the memories.

"I didn't think you could come with me into the memories," he blurted.

Dronth rumbled with laughter. "Even now we are still relearning things. Spath, for all of his wisdom, cannot walk his memories as I can."

Remus nodded, then turned back towards the bowl. "Why does this seem wrong?" he asked.

"This is the last Weyr, Wolf. In just a short while you will see the Weyr end and the time of the beasts begin," Dronth replied.

"But the dragons are here," protested Remus, then he stopped as he realized what he was seeing. The dragons before him were behaving more like mindless beasts than like the gentle giants he knew of. They were behaving like the dragons he had grown up with - dangerous and barely controlled.

"DOES ANYONE HEAR ME?" shouted a voice.

Remus stumbled and nearly fell to his knees, overcome by the power in that voice and by the raw emotions, the pure and terrible terror and loneliness.

Dronth looked toward the large bronze colored Horntail that perched on a ledge overlooking the Weyr.

"Mroth, elder and the last dragon in the world who can speak," Dronth said sadly, then he turned to Remus. "For turns Mroth has watched as dragons spoke less and less. Some were hatched that never said a word. He worried and tried talking to them. He wept in anguish as his people slipped into the role of beasts."

"We changed, Wolf," Dronth said. "We needed our riders to tie us to our intelligence. Without them, we could not hold onto it. Poor Mroth is of my line, mated with what he considered a mindless female. Throughout most of his life, he has lived alone, surrounded by a constant reminder of what he was missing. One of my ancestors heard his pleas, but could not reply and barely understood the words. I didn't understand the words, or this memory, until the Weyrleader woke us up."

"ANYONE, PLEASE!" bellowed the Mroth.

Remus was struck by the fact that not a single dragon of the many thousands visible even looked at him.

Mroth bellowed an anguished call and leapt into the sky, then he vanished from view.

Dronth lowered his head to the ground and keened softly. "Even a dragon can die from loneliness, Wolf. The silence is now complete."

Remus sank to the ground and wept. Mroth had jumped Between to escape the silence. And with him went the last intelligent dragon on the planet. He knew they were still intelligent, but now they were locked in their minds and driven more by instinct than by intellect.

Dronth eyed the human for a moment, then he ended the memory, bringing both back.

Spath eyed the pair as they became aware of their surroundings again. It was clear that the memory had moved them both powerfully.

Dronth turned to Spath. "The Weyrleader has chosen well with this one, elder," he said privately.

"He has chosen well with all of his family, Dronth. Despite his personal fears and misgivings, we have been blessed with a Weyrleader as great as the first."

"I hope it be so, elder," replied Dronth.

The two dragons turned their attention to Remus, who was still weeping for Mroth. Like Harry, he was developing a love of these gentle giants that he found hard to express.

Transfiguration Classroom, Hogwarts, February 8th...

Minerva jumped from her chair when her hat flew off her head and the sorting hat appeared there. Fortunately, she was between classes and wouldn't have any students for another hour.

"Clarence?"

"You may call me the Hatmaster," Clarence replied in an ominous tone.

"Clarence!" Minerva exclaimed.

The hat snickered. "Oh, very well, I just thought I'd drop by to let you know there is a group of aurors attempting to approach the castle," replied the hat.

"Attempting?"

"I bounced them off the wards to slow them down and reduce their numbers. Four were marked as Riddle's men. Now that Snape is out of the castle, I don't have to allow his kind in here again," the hat replied smugly.

Minerva sighed. She knew she was about to face a group of unhappy aurors and there was no avoiding it. On the other hand, she wholeheartedly agreed with Clarence on banning those men from entering the castle grounds.

Her door suddenly slammed open and eight men walked in.

She stood and glared angrily. "What is the meaning of this?"

"By order of the Ministry of Magic, and by the direct command of the Minister of Magic, you will turn over the keys to the wards to me" declared a man. "I have been assigned the role of Headmaster."

"What pompous assholes!" exclaimed the hat from Minerva's head. "The Deputy doesn't control the wards of this school." The hat lifted the Professor's head and floated gently to the desktop. Turning, it faced the men in the room. "Hogwarts has taken back control of the wards and she will only relinquish them when I decide there is a suitable candidate for the role of Headmaster. And let me assure you, Smythe, you are not a suitable candidate. You were a disgusting little pervert at age eleven and I don't think you've changed for the better in the past twenty years."

Minerva stared at the hat for the moment, as did the aurors, then she turned her attention back to them. "I do not control the wards for the school. I am just the Deputy Headmistress. In the absence of Headmaster Dumbledore, the school has resumed full control of the wards as the Founders wanted. Go back to Fudge and his toadies and tell them any attempts to control the school will fail. Also tell him

that since we weren't the ones bribed to believe the Imperius alibi, the wards are now set to deny entry to anyone bearing the Dark Mark."

"You can't do this," exclaimed the man identified as Symthe. "I'm the new Headmaster and I demand you do what I say!"

"Waaa, waaa, waaa!" exclaimed Clarence sarcastically. "Tell me, Smythe, did you ever recover from the impotence curse Margret Candleless cast on you for attempting to rape her in your sixth year? Even if you weren't a pervert, your grades wouldn't even allow you to be a Professor at this school, let alone Headmaster."

Smythe, mottled with rage, whipped out his wand. "Incendio!" he cried, aiming at the hat.

The spell splashed harmlessly against a shield, then Smythe found himself bodily picked up and hurled against a wall with bone breaking force. He slid to the floor in a moaning heap.

Minerva looked calmly at the other aurors. It was clear she had done nothing. She wasn't even holding her wand. "I suggest you go back to your boss and tell him that Hogwarts is in control and she will accept no politically appointed candidate. With the Headmaster absent, she will remain in control of the wards. If the Headmaster fails to return, the school will choose who the next Headmaster will be."

"Let's take her in," said an auror.

"On what charge? Telling us that she can't do anything because she's not the one responsible for what's going on?" asked Kingsley Shacklebolt rhetorically. He had been watching the spectacle and quickly realized that Minerva wasn't the one in control here.

"Instead of coming here and asking for an explanation of the situation, that idiot demanded changes. When he was refused, he had a temper tantrum," Kingsley said. He gave Minerva a slight smile and an apologetic shrug. "Frankly, I resent being pulled off of my active cases to play nursemaid on trash appointed by the Minister."

Several other aurors nodded. Most had been working on the case of the missing Hogwarts students.

"So, what do we do with him?" asked an auror, nudging Smythe with a toe. The man moaned on the floor.

Kingsley shrugged. "He slipped and fell down. Slap a St. Mungo's portkey on him. It's not like we can arrest the castle."

The aurors nodded and someone knelt by Smythe, pinning something to his robe. He glowed blue for a moment, and shook like crazy, but went nowhere.

Clarence sighed. "Oh, very well," he announced. Smythe rose up in the air and banged against the wall several times with increasing force before he vanished from sight.

Minerva gaped and looked at the hat.

"What? Portkeys don't work within the wards and it takes time to lower them enough to let him pass through," exclaimed the hat innocently.

Several of the aurors started to chuckle.

Kingsley stepped forward. "Minerva, while I'm here, have you heard any word from the missing students?"

She shook her head and gave him a tight smile. "No. I was about to ask you the same thing. I have heard from the Headmaster. He now knows of the missing students, but is unable to return at this time. I asked him for an explanation of his absence and all he said was that he regrets it deeply and has confidence that I'll do fine in his absence."

Kingsley nodded. The old man missing wasn't his concern. Dumbledore had gone off like this in the past. As far as he knew, there were no charges against the man, so it was of no concern to him.

"How did he contact you?" asked one of the aurors.

"Via his familiar, Fawkes."

Several of the aurors nodded approvingly. He couldn't have picked a better messenger. Every time a Phoenix flashed to flame, any enchantments on it were broken. It was impossible to track a Phoenix or anything it carried.

Kingsley shook his head unhappily. "I wish they'd contact their friends," he said. "Mister Malfoy is going insane because someone started a rumor that his boy ran off with Miss Bulstrode. Madam Bones is becoming unbearable to be around, but at least she's keeping her nose out of the investigation."

"I sympathize, Auror Shacklebolt, but we have not heard from any of the students. I asked the hat about them and it expressed an opinion that they are safe and together, but when I pressed the issue, it admitted it was merely an opinion and had no facts to back it up."

"Makes sense, Shack," muttered one of the aurors. "Despite the rumors floating around the office, it seems to me that they all left as a group. Each of them took their trunk and every thing they brought with them to the school."

Shacklebolt nodded thoughtfully, then he turned back to Minerva. "That's an idea. Do you recall the students congregating, meeting in the library perhaps, or taking a meal together?"

Minerva shook her head. "No, but it's a big school. I'll ask the staff if they remember seeing them together at any point. Considering the fact that all four houses are involved, any meeting that happened would have been noted, if only for the fact that Slytherins and Gryffindors weren't at each others throats."

Several aurors chuckled and Shacklebolt smiled grimly. He wasn't a Hogwarts alumni, so the animosity between the houses always puzzled him.

"Thank you, Minerva," he said softly. "We'd best be getting back to the office."

She nodded and waited until they left her classroom before she settled back into her chair with a heavy sigh of relief.

"I think that went rather well, don't you?" asked the hat.

She eyed the wayward headpiece warily. "Well? You do know they'll be back and in greater numbers, don't you?"

"And do what, Minerva? Arrest the school? I suspect they won't be back for quite some time. These sorts of things take time. Tempers need to simmer and people need to ponder. For now, they will realize that the school is untouchable. Three months from now? That's a different story. The wards around this castle are the strongest ever cast by anyone and I know for a fact that the casting of those wards stole decades off the lives of our Founders.

"This is the reason why Hogwarts is aware. Each Founder gave up a piece of themselves so that the school could protect itself in times of crisis. I wouldn't tell you of this, but Hogwarts says you need to know, to understand that she will protect herself and her children. No puffed up popinjay is going to take over this school while she can prevent it."

Minerva nodded to the hat, then took a moment to compose herself. She was just in time, as the bell tolled, signaling the end of classes. In a few moments, students would start drifting into her classroom.

Campbeltown Weyr, February 9th...

Sirius chuckled softly as he backed out of the darkened office. He had just charmed Remus' office chair to make fart noises whenever he had a visitor sitting in the chair opposite his desk.

"You know, I just don't understand you, Mister Black."

Sirius started, then turned around, looking rather uncomfortable at getting caught.

Captain Atkins stood, looking at him with disapproval written all over her face.

He smiled at her. "A little laughter goes a long way to relieve stress, Captain."

She frowned. "Come with me," she commanded, then headed for her office.

He shrugged and followed her. Reaching her office, she eyed her chair with suspicion.

Sirius snickered. "I haven't done anything to your chair, Captain. I swear!"

She sat and looked up at him, trying not to glare. "Mister Black."

"Please, just Sirius. Mister Black was my father. He was a man who would have fit in among any insane asylum in the country," Sirius said smoothly.

Mister Black," she repeated firmly, "I like a joke as much as the next person, but you've also been pranking my people and I can't have that. You are interfering with their jobs."

Sirius frowned slightly, then he nodded. "Fine," he said softly, "I'll leave your people alone."

She shook her head. "I just don't understand you. One moment you're deadly serious and the next your starting a water balloon fight with the potential riders."

He motioned to the chair across from her and she nodded. He sat heavily and looked at her for a long minute. "Are you sure you really want to know, Captain?"

Katherine nodded. "Yes, I think I do because I fail to see why a grown man such as yourself acts like you're a child half the time."

Sirius scowled and leaned forward in his chair. "I was twenty-one when life as I knew it ended. My best friends were dead and the man responsible managed to pin the blame on me. I was thrown into prison without a trial, no interrogation, no interview with an inspector. They just tossed me into a cell and slammed the door shut.

"My girlfriend, the woman I wanted to marry, gave up on me immediately. I never heard from her again and later learned after I escaped that she had been killed in an accident. For more than a decade, I survived without talking to anyone. I survived a prison that was designed to drive men insane for one simple reason. The one thing the dementors couldn't take away from me was the fact that I was innocent. I repeated that fact daily and never forgot it."

"Dementors?" asked Katherine. His story sounded a little too unbelievable, but the unfamiliar term caught her attention.

Sirius shivered and looked at her. It was the first time she'd ever seen him with such raw emotion in his gaze. "A dementor is considered a Class Three Demon under the control of the Ministry of Magic. Exposure to one of these creatures drains you of any happy thoughts. They claim the dementor feeds on such thoughts, but I don't believe that to be true. I think the beasts feed on negative emotions and use a form of magic to prevent you from feeling anything but negative emotions.

"The Ministry uses dementors to guard Azkaban prison and to execute prisoners. A dementor's kiss will suck the soul from the victim, leaving the body a mindless, catatonic husk. Imagine spending twenty four hours a day reliving the absolute worst moments of your life. Imagine seeing the dead bodies of your friends over and over again in an unending cycle that you can't stop.

"Little is known about the effects of long term exposure to dementors, Katherine," Sirius said softly. "I managed to lessen their effect on me by using my animal form, but I know I came out of there a changed person."

Katherine looked at him, shocked by what he had said. "I'm sorry. I didn't know," she said quietly.

He smiled sadly at her. "There's no reason why you should have known. It's not something I run around blabbing about. 'I survived Azkaban! Ask me how!'" He shook his head and shrugged. "The pranks are just something that makes me feel like I'm still alive."

She sighed and nodded. "All right, I'm changing my request. If you're going to prank any of my staff, keep it to stuff that won't interfere with their jobs."

He grinned and stood up. He walked to the door, then turned to face her. "You're on duty all night?"

She nodded. "Yes. Two of my people are down with flu and I wanted to be available in case I needed to cover for someone."

"Can I buy you a cup of coffee, then?" he asked.

She smiled and pushed back from her desk. "That sounds really good right about now. I have to make a perimeter inspection in an hour. Some coffee to warm me up before hand will be a help." Standing, she walked over to join him.

As the pair walked over to the Kitchen Hall, Katherine thought about the pieces of the picture she was building in her mind of Sirius Black. He was a complex man and there was a lot more to him than she had originally thought.

The Hatching Weyr, Disko Island Greenland, February 10th...

Harry arrived first in a burst of frigid air. A second later, sixty more dragons appeared. The dragons in the bowl below bellowed and trumpeted in welcome. This was the moment they'd been waiting for.

Harry led the new arrivals in a pass over the Weyr, giving them a chance to see the caldera from the air. It was a bleak and unwelcoming place to human eyes, but ideally suited for dragons. Near the hot springs in the center of the bowl, Dobby had erected a series of tents that would house the potentials for now.

At Harry's signal, the dragons came in to land near the tents and discharge their passengers. Some of the dragons were saddened by the knowledge that many of these humans would soon have their own dragons to care for. At the same time, it had been proven that a close bond of friendship could develop between humans and those dragons too old to impress.

Harry walked over to the group and was surprised by the shocked expression on Emma Granger's face. She looked appalled at the row of tents and he started to chuckle.

May walked over to stand next to Harry. "What's so funny?"

He pointed at Emma and Hermione, who'd walked over to join her mother. Both looked at the tents in dismay.

"I admit the idea of roughing it doesn't appeal to me either, Harry. It's cold and tents aren't going to keep us very warm," May retorted, then she frowned as Harry started laughing.

He waved her to follow and he walked over to where Emma stood. "Mrs Granger, it's not what it looks like, although I am surprised at your daughter."

Hermione looked at Harry in surprise, then frowned.

"Hello? Don't you remember the tents we used for the world cup?" he asked.

She gasped and looked at the tents again.

Harry grabbed Emma's hand and tugged her toward the closest tent. "Come on, I have something you need to see."

He walked over to the nearest tent and opened the flap. Emma peered in and gasped. "All of the tents are like this. There's enough room for twelve people per tent. It might look like an ordinary tent on the outside, it's nothing like it on the inside. It only looks like we're roughing it."

Still holding the flap open, he turned to see everyone clustered around the entrance, floored by the much larger, well appointed interior.

"Each tent, except for one, has a list of names assigned to it. Find your tent and get settled in. The unmarked tent contains no bedrooms. It's going to be our main meeting room, as well as our classroom, for the next month or more. There are also a few offices that will be used by the adults.

"Now, everyone get settled, then come to the meeting tent in thirty minutes," He said, then watched as the group slowly dispersed.

Harry turned and motioned to Chekiath, who rumbled with laughter before they headed back to the cave they had used when they'd first come to the Weyr.

"It is good to be home," Chekiath said after settling into his bed space.

Harry paused mid-stride and smiled. "Yes, it does seem like home, doesn't it?"

Tossing a bag with clothing off to one side of his bed, he looked around, then shook his head. The place was spotless. "Dobby?"

He sat on the edge of the bed and waited.

Dobby appeared a moment later with a pot of hot tea and a small platter of biscuits, which he placed on the table he had stolen from Snape's quarters.

"Dobby, have you been cleaning up here?"

Dobby nodded happily. "Yes, Harry Potter sir. It wasn't hard to pop back over here and clean up every so often."

Harry frowned. "Please don't take this the wrong way, but should we bring in more elves to help you? I mean, I'm worried you might work yourself to death."

"Is Dobby doing wrong, Harry Potter sir?"

Harry sighed. He just knew the little guy would take it the wrong way. "No, Dobby. I am just worried about you. Would it help if we find some more elves to hire?"

Dobby frowned and looked down for a moment. "I could try, Harry Potter sir, but other elves might be as afraid of dragons as I was."

Harry nodded. "Yes, I can see that. But if you find an elf who wants to work with us, bring them to me and I will help introduce them to the dragons so they won't be afraid."

"Harry Potter sir?"

"Yes?"

"Will big dragons protect elves? The elves I knows would be killed by wizards if they caught them. They hide in old unused homes now, but if they come out and help dragons, wizards may find them," Dobby said seriously.

"Dobby, dragons will protect their friends, human or elf."

"Of course we'd protect you, Dobby," Chekiath said firmly. "You're my friend. I wouldn't let anyone hurt you. All the dragons like you and I'm sure they'd like your friends."

Dobby smiled shyly at Chekiath.

Relieved to have that out of the way, Harry sat down at his desk and began to work on notes for his next class.

In a tent outside, Dan held the flap open as the last of the students entered. He was about to follow them inside when someone spoke softly to him.

"Tooth Puller? You are a healer of teeth, yes?"

He turned to discover he was practically nose to snout with a Norwegian Ridgeback. He took a startled step backwards, then straightened. "Yes, you could say that."

The dragon opened its mouth and Dan took a sharp breath. The dragon's mouth was easily big enough for him to crawl into. Each tooth was serrated towards the back of the mouth and came to a needle fine point roughly four to six inches above the gum line. There was a gap of roughly two inches between each tooth.

Unable to contain his curiosity, he leaned closer and spotted the problem almost immediately. A large tooth had an obvious cavity that need to be cleaned out and packed with some sort of filling. The gum surrounding the tooth was swollen and a deep red. The hole in the tooth was enormous.

He pulled back from his inspection. "You can close your mouth now."

"I am called Skanth, from the Knik Glacier Weyr. I am honored to meet you, Tooth Puller. Can you help me?"

Dan frowned and nodded. "I think I can, Skanth, but I'll need to take several days to assemble the supplies I'll need. Are you in much pain? If so, I can send word back to Campbeltown town for Hagrid to bring something to help."

"I would be grateful if you did, Tooth Puller. It is hard to make sure my egg is well tended when my mouth hurts so much," replied Skanth.

Dan reached out and patted the dragon gently. "I'll go take care of that right now."

As Skanth backed away, leaving Dan with room to move, he darted around the dragon and jogged off to find Harry. He was surprised to find himself excited by the idea of dragon dentistry. He wasn't sure anyone had thought of tooth issues when talking about the dragons health. But why not? As Skanth proved, a bad tooth could cause problems for even the largest of dragons.

Ministry of Magic, February 10th...

Delores Umbridge sat in an office just off the main corridor to the Atrium. It was an office that had been formerly used by the DMLE, but had gone back into the general pool when the person manning the office died last year.

She had two other people with her and they all watched the corridor in anticipation. The building was mostly empty, except for a few night workers. The cleaning staff was made up mostly of squibs, and one very conscientious department head who was becoming a major pain in the side of the Minister.

Amelia Bones walked by the office door and never noticed the three people watching for her. It was late and she was tired from a long day.

Once she had cleared the office door, Delores nodded to her companions and they stood and quietly left the office.

Amelia stepped into the lift, turned and spotted the two men. Alarmed, she went for her wand, but it was too late.

Three wands flashed and she slumped against the back of the lift. One of the men cursed softly and cast a binding spell on his injury, while the other checked to make sure Bones was dead.

Their instructions were simple. Make sure Bones served the purpose of sending a message. When the body was found, it would

look like a possible revenge slaying to most people. But to others in the Ministry, it would send a clear message: Don't make waves.

The Hatching Weyr, Disko Island Greenland, February 12th...

"Thank you, Spath," Harry said heavily. "I'll relay the message."

Word had reached Campbeltown, via Fawkes, of the murder of Amelia Bones and Dumbledore asked Spath to relay the message to Harry. Fawkes would come by later today with a copy of the Daily Prophet, but Dumbledore felt the news should be sent via dragon, as it was quicker.

He stood and walked out of his Weyr.

Chekiath followed him a few steps behind, crooning softly. Chekiath knew Harry was upset and knew that soon, one of the potential riders would also be upset. He followed Harry unhappily and the other dragons picked up on his concern. As they walked, a hush fell over the Weyr.

Harry was upset. He didn't know Madam Bones, but from all he had heard, she was one of the truly honest people working at the Ministry. He was also concerned about how this would affect Susan, her niece.

Harry walked into the main meeting tent and went to the office that Emma had taken over.

When he entered, Emma glanced up from her reading. Harry had asked her to put together a plan for bringing in tutors to help the magical students get up to speed and she was tackling that job with the signature Granger fervor. Lord Mills would handle the financial aspects of the tutors, but Emma was working on what subjects would be taught and what they would need in terms of books and classrooms.

She started to smile until she noted Harry's somber expression. "What's happened?" she asked worriedly.

He sat and held up a hand for a moment, then he turned to Emma. "I've asked Momnarth to send in Hermione, May and Susan. I have

some bad news for Susan and I think she's going to need some friends," he replied. "Susan's aunt was murdered at the Ministry. We won't know more until Fawkes shows up with the morning paper, but Albus says they think it was a revenge killing."

Emma gasped in horror. She didn't know the woman, but she knew she was the only family Susan had left.

A knock interrupted her train of thought and the three girls entered the room. Harry stood and walked over to lean against a wall so all three could sit.

"Momnarth said you wanted to see us? We were right in the middle of a lesson on wing sail repairs," Hermione said in annoyance. She hated to have a lesson interrupted.

"Yes, I called you here," Harry said quietly. "Susan, word came from Campbeltown Weyr via Spath this morning. Your aunt..."

He paused and took a shuddering breath. "Your aunt was murdered," he said. "I can't begin to tell you how sorry I am."

Susan stared at him for a moment, and the two girls at her side instantly realized why they had been called in with her.

She moved her mouth a few times without saying anything, then a sob broke free. Hermione and May moved closer and Emma stood and walked around her desk. She took the girl into her arms and held her as she broke down and cried.

Harry stayed where he was, afraid to interfere. He was uncomfortable and unsure of what he could do to help. Susan, like himself, was now an orphan.

While Emma comforted Susan, with the help of Hermione and May, Harry sighed and slipped from the room, suddenly feeling very tired and older than his years.

"Are you all right, Harry?" asked Cheki worriedly.

"Yeah, I'm fine, mate. I know family is a different thing for dragons, but to lose one's family is a very painful thing for humans. Telling her about her aunt reminded me that I, too, have no family."

"You may not have parents anymore, Harry, but you have a family. We're family. The Weyr is our family, and someday you'll even mate with a female and breed a new family all your own," Chekiath said fervently enough to make Harry smile.

"Oh? And which female do you think I should breed with?" he asked. Chekiath was a veritable fount of advice when it came to picking a female to mate with. Harry might have even taken his advice, were it not for the fact that the dragon had never mated in his life and wouldn't be ready for that activity for a number of months to come.

"Why stop at one? A male needs to cover as many as he can in his life," Chekiath replied seriously. "It's good for the bloodline and enhances the species."

"That's going to go over well, isn't it? Smelly Dog would cheer me on and the girls would slit my throat," Harry replied with a smile, then he summoned his flying jacket from his Weyr and pulled it on. "Fancy a bit of a fly?"

"Always with you," replied Chekiath.

Harry smiled and climbed onto Chekiath's back. A moment later they sprang aloft and were soaring over the bowl.

He never noticed Karen Khan, who had been listening to their conversation. By evening, the girls would be gossiping that to get to Harry, one had to get Chekiath's approval first.

Hogwarts, February 14th...

It was bitterly cold and a stiff wind swept across the lake. The crowd had been assembling for over an hour before the students arrived to fill the stands.

Minerva watched from the sidelines in disapproval. The Ministry was pushing for this tournament to proceed over her objections.

"May I have your attention please," announced a loud voice and everyone turned to see a red head standing next to the judges.

"I am Percy Ignatius Weasley, special assistant to Senior Undersecretary Delores Umbridge, and the official judge replacing Dumbledore, who has decided to neglect his responsibilities."

Minerva glowered at him and he flinched slightly before ignoring her.

"In a few moments our three champions will be sent into the lake to rescue someone very close to..."

"No."

Percy stopped and turned to stare. All three champions stood shoulder to shoulder, then Krum stepped forward. "We vill compete no more. Dere is no honor in this contest. You organizers lied to us and forced a 14 year old boy to compete."

"But the tournament," protested Percy. "You are making us look like fools!"

"We are not making anyting," declared Krum.

"You are what you are," Cedric said. "I agree with Victor. We talked it over and agreed. We hereby withdraw from the tournament."

He glanced at his watch and smiled.

"It wasn't hard to figure out who you would take, and Victor, thanks to his status as a professional athlete, is licensed by his government to make portkeys," Cedric said.

Before Percy could speak, three bound people appeared at their feet. Fleur cried out and knelt to release her sister.

"If you don't compete I'll see you all thrown into Azkaban!" declared Percy.

"Try it, leettle mon," snarled Fleur.

Percy blanched as light feathers covered her arms. He knew she'd be hurling fireballs in another moment. He could have been legally allowed to put her down as a dark creature, but her father was a high ranking member of the French Ministry. Killing her would cause a major international incident.

Percy stormed away to talk to the other judges.

Nearby, Minerva smiled. "Fifty points to Hufflepuff, Mister Diggory," she said softly.

It would be recorded in Hogwarts a History that the very last Tri-Wizard tournament ever was held there in 1995 and it ended in controversy as the contestants refused to participate.

The Hatching Weyr, Disko Island Greenland, February 15th...

"Thanks to a conversation with Dobby, I've hired on an additional five house elves. Four of them are like Dobby. They have no real training in any particular field and will take care of general tasks. The fifth was trained to be a household cook until he was given clothes by his former master.

"I've placed Dobby in charge of the elves in the Weyr and they have orders to clean up offices and other areas. I've told them that they're not allowed to clean up the sleeping quarters of the potentials. Please remember, these elves have been abused. A kind word and a little courtesy for them would be very welcome. The dragons have all promised to look out for them."

He looked up from his parchment and noted everyone nodding at him.

"All right," Harry said, then glanced down at his parchment again. "My next item is a simple one. Mister Granger? Having dealt with Skanth, how important is it that we start checking all of the dragon's teeth?"

When Dan smiled at him, he relaxed a little. He hadn't been looking forward to spending days checking teeth.

"Unlike humans," Dan began, "dragons do not have permanent teeth. Near as I can determine without bringing in an x-ray machine, they're in a continuous process of losing teeth all their lives. Now, having said that, let me point out that Skanth isn't a unique case. A number of dragons have contacted me via Skanth about the pain they are experiencing.

"In Skanth's case, I obtained a large supply of dental porcelain, and after cleaning out the cavity, have managed to fill the hole. Skanth is reporting her tooth has stopped hurting and the inflammation of her gum is subsiding. Given enough time, that particular tooth will fall out on its own without any help on my part.

"I am looking into methods that can be employed by riderless dragons that can clean their teeth. For the most part, however, unless a dragon reports that the pain is too much to bare, I don't think I'll be redesigning my dental chair for draconic patients. Dragons with riders can, of course, rely on their riders to help them with their tooth care. As for those dragons experiencing too much pain, they now know to come to Hagrid's clinic at Campbeltown. I've asked Lord Mills to locate larger versions of some standard dental tools and we'll deal with them on a case by case basis."

"Thank you, Mister Granger," he said, then he checked his list. "The dragons at the Hatching Weyr have finished hollowing out a large vault next to the Hatching chamber. I've spoken with Polenth on several occasions and he's thinking that perhaps I might talk with Ragnok. Meanwhile, I am very happy to say that the dragons of Gringotts have a place to jump to that will protect them from exposure to sunlight. There are a number of passages, long enough to ensure proper ventilation to the chamber but keep direct light out."

"Harry, talking to Ragnok might not be a bad idea, but I'm curious. What will you say to him?" asked Remus.

Harry looked down at the table in front of him for a moment, then he looked up. "Remus, you know I don't want to get the dragons involved in a war, but the fact remains that the wizards are still probing the Weyrs, trying to figure out ways to take over again.

"I don't trust the Goblins, but they have upheld their part of the bargain. They've been working with the dragons to continue some of their business lines. They've also explored opening new lines to compensate for what they've lost. Trust has to start somewhere. I would tell Ragnok that if the wizards attack Gringotts, the dragons would come to their aid."

"But what about their not killing humans?" exclaimed Emma.

Harry looked at her and smiled slightly. "The Pern Standard was a dragon that would never knowingly harm a human. That standard was once designed into dragons, but we know it's been at least twelve thousand years since that time. And during all those long years, dragons have clearly moved away from Pern Standard.

"A dragon can kill, but only under extreme circumstances. However, they have fought to defend themselves several times since my impression and there have been numerous injuries. I don't want to order a dragon to kill anyone, but there are things we can do to help the Goblins. We can use dragons to evacuate them. We can use their ability to go Between to confuse and confound the wizards. We can use fire to scare and, if necessary, drive them back. And then there's the shock of the cold from Between.

"Imagine moving forward with other wizards, then suddenly being blasted by a burst of air so cold the very sweat on your forehead freezes in an instant."

It was something he had noted about dragons, and when questioned, he learned that they chose the direction in which to channel the cold air. He was still exploring the ability with Chekiath, but he thought it might be possible at some point to have a dragon channel a continuous stream of cold air, rather than a single burst. As a precaution, he had warned the dragons not to speak of this to anyone.

The riders would learn of it, of course, but for now, it was a Weyr secret known only to Harry and the dragons. He had even taken the precaution of asking Selanth to never mention it to Hagrid. He loved the half giant dearly, but he knew he couldn't keep a secret to save his life.

Everyone present had felt that blast of frigid air and they all recalled being startled and a bit frightened by it.

He paused and let them think about that for a moment. "Sooner or later, the Muggles will be in the same boat as the goblins. The Prime Minister is going to demand justice for the attack on him. He's going to demand justice for the dragons as an intelligent species. I don't want us in a war, but if the Muggles are going to fight for dragons, then dragons, and their riders, must be willing to fight alongside their partners."

Remus nodded. "It makes sense," he murmured, then glanced around to the others. Sir Robert and Lord Mills had arrived with Remus for the meeting and both were nodding their approval. The men understood that Harry didn't want to risk the dragons, but he couldn't sit on the sidelines and let someone else fight his fight.

Seeing their agreement, he glanced down at his list, but stopped when he heard an odd sound.

"What is that?" exclaimed Dan Granger.

Having heard the sound once before, Harry looked up with a smile. Momnarth had crooned to Chekiath's egg during his hatching and the noises he was hearing now were remarkably similar, only it wasn't one lone dragon, but many crooning together. With so many dragon voices, the croon became a low humming sound that resonated and vibrated through the bones of both human and dragon kind as the hatchlings were encouraged by their elders.

"Grab your camera, Mister Granger," Harry said, as he bolted for the door while reaching for his wand. He paused in the door way and whispered an incantation, causing a bell like tone to ring in all of the tents.

"The eggs are starting to hatch," exclaimed Sir Robert in sudden understanding. "Quick! To the Hatching chamber!"

Harry took off at a run with everyone following as quickly as they could. From around the meeting tent, potentials spilled from their tents, their eyes lit with excitement.

Harry stopped at the entrance to the chamber and watched as dragon after dragon appeared overhead and flew unerringly for the entrance. "Come on!" he shouted towards the potentials. He was surprised and shocked by the eager grin that graced the faces of his friends. Although he would later admit that Luna's expression bordered more on the radically insane.

His own impression had been entirely accidental. But these teenagers had been training and anticipating this moment for the past two weeks. They had been exposed to intelligent dragons and were eager to have a dragon of their own. They wanted to

experience the bond for themselves, rather than hearing about it second hand.

Dragons bellowed in welcome as more of the great creatures appeared overhead, this time carrying people from Campbeltown Weyr. Spath appeared to be carrying Dumbledore and Norendrath had Sirius, as well as Captain Atkins. Harry made a note to ask him about that later.

Fawkes appeared by himself and he circled overhead for a moment, singing happily. He then dove down and flared out just in time to land gently on Dumbledore's shoulder.

Stepping into the chamber, he repressed the urge to marvel at the sheer size of the space. The dragons had used the very hottest of dragon fire to hollow out the space by vaporizing the rock, then Dobby and Hagrid had brought in tons of sand, which they spread over the floor. The heat from below was sufficient to warm the sands, helping to mature the eggs.

A set of raised rock benches stood off to one side for spectators to sit above the heated sands. Simple wood planking lined the stands and protected the spectators from the heated rock. A ledge ran around the rest of the chamber, allowing dragons to perch and watch the hatching.

Harry walked over to the cluster of potentials and noted there was no division between them now. Muggle or magical, they were all just potential riders. The emotions on their faces ran the gamut of eagerness to nervousness.

He stood in front of the group and raised a hand, and he smiled when they focused on him, rather than the eggs. "Relax. As each dragon hatches they will most likely come toward your group, so spread out. Remember that a newly hatched dragon is dangerous to itself and you, so don't panic. Get out of the way if one seems to be moving toward something or someone behind you."

Everyone watched and listened to Harry. Nearby, those people who weren't potential riders sat watching. Dan Granger and James Mills both were running video recorders, hoping to film the entire experience.

Harry glanced behind him where several eggs were rocking violently, then he looked at the potentials. "Good luck," he said, then he turned and trotted over to Sirius and Remus and sat down.

Around the raised rim of the chamber perched dozens of crooning dragons. Then it happened, one solitary egg split apart and a Hungarian Horntail fell out of the egg.

Seeing it, Harry frowned. Rather than the usual brownish cast to its scales, this dragon appeared to be softer, more golden in color.

The little dragonette bleated mournfully as it took in the hatching chamber and the crowd of humans and dragons watching anxiously.

The dragonette locked its gaze on the group of potentials and shuffled forward, while the adult dragons increased the volume of their crooning. The potential riders shuffled and jostled slightly and Susan Bones found herself on the outer edge of the group staring into the twirling yellow eyes.

"Susan, my heart, don't be sad anymore. I'll be your family. We'll be together forever," said Nimonth.

Susan blinked and her mouth moved, but she didn't say anything, then she knelt and wrapped her arms around the neck of her dragon and wept with joy. The little dragon nuzzled with her and crooned softly, comforting her new rider.

Hagrid stood nearby waiting. He'd give her a few minutes to compose herself, then he'd lead the new pair out of the Hatching chamber. His grin was so wide Harry was afraid the top of his head was going to come off.

For Hagrid, it was a very special moment. He had a fellowship with Harry through his dragon. Now, the people around him who considered him family would grow enormously and he was well pleased by the thought.

Harry watched Susan with a smile, knowing what she was feeling. In the time he had been watching Susan, Gordon Chapman and Karen Khan both impressed, one a greenish colored Vipertooth, the other a bluish colored Norwegian Ridgeback.

"Notice the colors are off?" commented Remus.

"Your Pern standard theory?" Harry asked worriedly.

Remus shrugged. "We thought they'd be moving back to Pern Standard. This is just more proof of that idea. I think we'll eventually see a lot of the coloring returning."

Emma whistled and clapped loudly and Harry turned away from Remus to see Hermione, seated on the hot ground, eye to eye with another golden Horntail. She had tears streaming down her cheeks and a huge smile. She reached up to caress the eye ridges and her dragon crooned soothingly to her.

"Everything set now, Harry?" Remus asked.

Harry tore his eyes away from Hermione to look at Remus. "Dobby's got the new Weyr caves set up. They're pretty basic, really. Just a bed, desk, chair and dresser, as well as a sandy bed for the dragon. It'll do for the next few weeks. It's not like they'll stay here permanently," he replied, then he clapped when May impressed a gold tinged colored Horntail.

Luna impressed a brownish colored Ukrainian Ironbelly and Harry was sure she was disappointed to discover that she couldn't name her dragon. It was hard for him to tell, though. Nearly every girl who impressed was crying by the time the impression was done.

Harry did a quick head count, then checked the number of eggs. They had 32 eggs and forty total potentials, so eight people were going to be disappointed. More people clapped and he noted Draco Malfoy proudly leading his dragonette from the chamber. He could have sworn that both Malfoy and the dragonette strutted towards the area Hagrid had set up.

Harry had discovered that Draco was much changed since the first task. They'd never be best mates, but he thought this version of Draco was easier to get along with. He was still arrogant, but he had managed to soften that considerably.

Outside of the hatching chamber, Hagrid had set up a holding pen containing nearly sixty sheep for the hatchlings to feast on.

It took nearly four hours for all the eggs to hatch. At the end, Harry felt emotionally drained. He was glad that Susan impressed. Now she wouldn't be alone. He was also happy for Hermione, May, Luna and the other successful new riders. But he felt badly for those who didn't impress. He would give them a shot at impressing as often as possible until they were too old to do so.

He walked over to the group of disappointed potential riders. "I'm sorry you didn't impress this time around. But you'll have another chance to do so come the fall, if you want."

"We can stay til then?" asked a startled Lisa Turpin.

Harry nodded with a tight smile. "The old time Weyrs had a lot of people in them who weren't riders. And I'm certain that with thirty two newly hatched dragons, those new riders would be happy to have someone offer a hand now and then."

Several of the group looked unconvinced and he was sure within a few days some would ask to go home. Others, however, looked relieved at his words.

"Take some time and think about it. In the meantime, you're welcome here," he repeated, then he turned and trudged back to his Weyr.

The Hatching Weyr, Disko Island Greenland, February 16th...

Harry and Hagrid watched as the new riders filed into the chamber, followed by their dragons. Both men were smiling broadly, noting each new rider watching their dragon carefully.

"Good morning, Dragon Riders," Harry called.

A grin swept through the group and they all stood a little taller and prouder.

"By now, your dragon has been fed and I'm sure you learned that dragons seem to have missed the lesson on table manners. Your dragon will not need to eat again until the day after tomorrow. An adult dragon will eat once a week, but depending on size, will usually consume four or five sheep at one time, or perhaps two cows. Your dragon will eat far less than an adult, but if the pair of

you has been working hard, your dragon may need to eat more frequently."

"How will we know if the dragon needs to eat?" asked Karen.

"Good question. Besides the obvious one of your Neruth telling you, there are a few other signs of a dragon being hungry. A grayish tinge to his coloring is the most obvious sign, but it could also be an indication of an exhausted dragon. So, if your dragon has a gray tinge, ask him or her. Your dragon won't ever lie to you, but he won't volunteer information if he thinks you're too busy with something else," Harry replied.

He hooked his thumbs in his belt and looked at his riders. "Before you impressed, you worked for a few hours a day on a dragon. Now you're going to living with one. It's a big difference. For the rest of your lives you will have a constant companion in your mind and in your life."

"I tried talking to Chekiath last night, but he couldn't hear me," Hermione said, interrupting him.

Harry smiled back. "All right, let's talk about that. Each of you have a mental connection to your dragon. You can hear him, and no matter where you are in the world in relation to your dragon, he can hear you. According to Remus, the Pern Standard dragon would rarely speak to any person other than their rider, or their rider's mate. He thinks, and mind you, this is only his theory and not proven, but he thinks that when I woke the dragon's abilities, they became so talkative because of the novelty of it.

"I think another reason why they are so talkative is the dragons realize that they need to prove they are thinking beings. It's easy for us riders to say so, but look at it from the perspective of a non-rider and you'll see there is a real need for them to speak up.

"The ability to speak to any dragon and be heard is unusual, but it did happen on Pern. One of the reasons why I was chosen by the dragons to be Weyrleader is because I can speak to any dragon, individually or collectively, anywhere they may be. You, even as riders, when it comes to dragons other than your own you must be in a dragon's proximity for them to hear you speaking," Harry said in conclusion.

He looked at Hermione and raised an eyebrow.

She nodded, satisfied with his answer.

Gordon Chapman frowned and his dragon turned to eye him. "He is your Weyrleader. Just because you are older does not mean you are meant to be in charge," said Kirteth unhappily. Kirteth was a Vipertooth, smaller than most of the other dragons, with a definite greenish cast to his scales.

Harry's head snapped around to glare at Chapman, who looked suitably embarrassed and chastised by his dragon's very public dressing down.

Harry stood staring and never noticed the field of magic wrapping around him. "Is there a problem, Mister Chapman?" he asked in a voice as cold as Between.

Chapman wasn't a bad person, but he had an ingrained sense of superiority about him and it bothered him that Harry was the Weyrleader. He'd been in basic training with the army when he was picked as potential. And of all of the riders, he was the oldest. He didn't like the idea of answering to someone younger than he was.

He looked up at Harry, then paled. He couldn't see the magic flowing and warping the air around Harry, but he could sense the power behind the dark haired youth and knew he was no match for it. Challenging Potter would be a huge mistake.

"No, sir," he replied, cowed by Harry, as well as his own dragon. The emotions he felt from Kirteth made him feel worse than any scolding he had ever gotten while growing up.

Harry continued to glare for a moment longer, then turned when Hagrid placed a hand on his shoulder.

"All right there, Harry?" he asked worriedly.

Harry nodded. "Fine, Hagrid, just fine. Let's get them working on their wing exercises for the next half hour."

Hagrid nodded and beamed a smile that Harry returned.

Harry moved off to one side to let Selanth take his place in front of the group. When the dragon was in place, Hagrid demonstrated the exercises they would be doing with their dragons every morning and evening.

Harry waited until Hagrid had the students try the exercises before he moved to walk among them. He stopped next to Mariah Varghese and her Buth. "Mariah, try to get Buth to extend her wings more. I understand the wing joints are tender still, but she needs to get full extension in order to lock the wing joints," he said.

Mariah looked up and shot him a very shy smile, then she turned back to Buth and urged her to stretch a little bit more.

Harry smiled in encouragement as Buth extended her wings. Nodding in approval, he then moved off to find someone else to help.

He hadn't gone far when a pair of arms wrapped around him and he was suddenly very much aware of a very healthy female pressed against his chest.

"Thank you, Harry. I didn't understand. I never dreamed it could be like this," Susan whispered in his ear, then she released him after giving him a quick kiss on the cheek.

He blushed and stammered, but Susan waved him off with a smile of her own. She was aware that he was probably the shyest boy she knew. It amazed her that he could be so forceful and commanding one moment, then tongue tied and blushing like mad the next.

It was then that she realized that while Hermione and May might have had a head start in the race for Harry Potter, it was still an open field, with no clear winner in sight. She found that idea comforting. A lot of the girls had talked about Harry in the privacy of their rooms, but few wanted to openly declare they wanted to make a try for him. Susan knew that Harry's demonstration of power would heat up the race as the witches became more interested in him.

Harry, for his part, wasn't entirely oblivious to what was happening. He was more focused on his role with the dragons, however. The few times he was honest with himself, he admitted that he didn't have a clue what to do with the girls vying for his attention.

He nodded as he passed both May and Hermione who were concentrating on their dragons.

"Harry?" Chekiath said.

"Yes, Cheki?"

"Comaloth says that her rider wants to you to know how grateful she is and hopes that she can catch up with you later to talk?"

He smiled and looked over at Hermione, who was watching him intently now. He nodded to her and she gave him a smile before turning back to Comaloth. He wasn't surprised that Hermione would see that if dragons could talk to dragons, then they could relay messages. She might not be able to talk to every dragon, but her dragon could.

He stopped next to Luna and nodded approvingly. "You're doing well, Luna. And I think Trandieth is going to do just fine with you as her rider."

She grinned at him. "I can't wait til we can fly together. I'm sure we'll be able to find all sorts of exciting animals," she exclaimed.

"And eat them?" asked a hopeful Trandieth.

Harry chuckled and moved away while Luna turned back to her dragon and explained that you don't always eat rare animals. He could sympathize with her. It was a conversation he'd had repeatedly with Chekiath.

He stopped near Draco and Millicent. Both had found fitting in with the muggle potentials an uneasy transition. "How are you two doing?" he asked quietly.

Millicent beamed at him. She was ecstatic over her impression of Tarianth. "I never thought it could be like this," she gushed.

Sinnath placed his large head on Draco's shoulder and looked at Harry with eyes twirling slowly and filled with the green of amusement. "My rider is named after dragons. What more could I ask for?" he said.

Harry laughed at Sinnath and Draco reached up to rub his eye ridges. "Big oaf," he said affectionately.

"If I am an oaf, I got it from you."

Harry chuckled and waved, then turned and walked back to Hagrid. He was feeling very good about the new riders and their dragons. The first generation of riders was here and they would be the start of something bigger than anyone could have imagined.

Hours later, Harry found himself working at his desk when Hermione poked her head past the canvas that covered the opening to his Weyr.

"Harry, you busy?"

He pushed his book to one side after carefully marking his place. "Come on in, Hermione. I'm decent, but Cheki's naked. Then again, he always is. He's such an exhibitionist."

"I'm not naked," Chekiath said with a snort. "I have a magnificent coat of burnished scales that all the females admire."

"And you're so modest about it," Harry muttered.

"I don't need to brag. Even Hermione admires my scales," Chekiath proclaimed.

Hermione stared at the Horntail with a smile, then she paused mid-stride. "Hermione?"

Harry shrugged. "You're a rider now. New rules apply, as far as the dragons are concerned."

She frowned. "New rules?" She hated it when the rules changed without warning! "Wait! I'm not Fuzzy One anymore?" she asked hopefully.

Harry leaned back on his chair and motioned for her to sit on a very comfortable armchair that Dobby stole, but refused to say where he'd stolen it from. Now that Dobby had help in the Weyr he had more free time to follow his newest hobby of larceny. It wasn't

exactly theft, since Harry had given Dobby a bundle of cash and instructed him to leave money behind whenever he took something.

"It's like this. A dragon will make up a name for someone they like and deal with a lot. For example, Norendrath and Sirius are friends who work together. But Sirius isn't a rider, so he gets the name of Smelly Dog.

"Riders have different rules. If the dragon likes the rider, he will refer to them by name. If the dragon doesn't like the rider, he'll say Comaloth's rider, rather than use the rider's name. Chekiath likes you and he knows you're my friend. That means he honors you by using your given name," Harry said.

"So Remus is Wolf and Dumbledore is White Beard, but I'm Hermione and May is May?" she asked.

"If the dragon likes you, yes," he replied. "Not all get equal treatment and dragons are as different as people. Chekiath calls Chapman 'Kirteth's rider'."

"You don't think he's going to be a problem for you, do you?" she asked worriedly. She had read Remus' notes about the Weyrs of Pern and was concerned that Harry might find himself having to fight the larger boy at some point. Pern Weyrs didn't pick leadership using combat, but combat did happen. The dragon riders of Pern knew better, for the most part. None but the most twisted would purposely put their dragon at risk of going Between, should the rider die in combat.

Harry looked over at her for a moment, then relaxed slightly. "No, I don't think he's going to be an issue. The dragons made me Weyrleader, Until they change their mind, I'm stuck with the job. I can't honestly see us resorting to the Pern model for leader selection, since we don't have true queens. I suspect that, sooner or later, another rider will come along who can talk to all dragons and that will be the next person selected."

Hermione nodded, then she took a deep breath. "Harry, there's something I wanted to talk about."

"What is it?" he asked guardedly.

"Impressing Comaloth is fantastic. I didn't understand until it happened and I'm still not sure I can put it into words. But..." She paused and nibbled her lower lip nervously.

"But?"

"There's still something missing. I used to have this friend I was very close to. I made a mistake and hurt him badly. Since then, it's like a piece of me is missing. Comaloth fills a lot of that space, but there's still a place reserved for Harry," She looked at him unhappily. "I thought we were putting it behind us, but you've been so distant."

"Hermione," Harry replied in a pained voice, "we're still friends. It's just that things have gotten really complicated lately."

"I know part of it, Mister Weyrleader. You've taken those responsibilities to heart, as you should. But honestly I swear there are days when I'm sure you're going to keel over from exhaustion," she said archly. "Harry, I work hard, but not to the point where I'm ready to collapse."

Harry grimaced. "It's not that easy. Not too long ago, all I had to worry about was some dumb contest. Now I have five hundred and thirty five dragons to take care of, as well as thirty two new riders, another twenty or so people, plus the muggles, the Goblins and the wizards..."

Hermione held up a hand, stopping him. Standing, she walked over to his seat and crouched down. "We all see how hard you're working, and all of us new riders understand what your doing. But even you need to relax. All of the Weyr gathers every night to talk and spend time with each other, all except you."

He looked at her and smiled wanly. "I'll try, Hermione. I'll try to join with the others."

She nodded and rubbed his arm lightly with her hand. She knew at this point he was a little too raw for her to go with her initial impulse of kissing his cheek. "Please, Harry, I want the chance to reconnect with my best friend."

She smiled, then stood and backed slightly away.

"Thank you, Harry, for giving me a chance to impress, and for giving me a chance to be your friend again," she said softly, then she turned and walked out of the weyr, leaving Harry in stunned silence.

"I like her and Comaloth. Maybe you can mate with her when I cover Comaloth," Chekiath offered.

Harry winced and buried his face in his hands. Even his best friend was hitting on him!

Office of the Minister of Magic, London, February 20th...

Cornelius leaned back on his chair, listening to his people and musing at what a change the last few weeks had been. Rufus Scrimgeour would have replaced Amelia Bones when she was murdered, but he had been injured in an accident and had been forced to retire from the force. That paved the way for him to promote John Dawlish over several other senior candidates.

The Ministry was a changed place for the most part. The one area that still gave him troubles was the Department of Mysteries and he wasn't about to go against them. He didn't know what they'd done to Delores, but if someone mentioned the department within her hearing, she burst into tears.

He wanted no part of whatever caused her to cry at the mere mention of the place.

"The search for the missing students from Hogwarts continues, but it's looking bleaker every day. The simple fact is that we have no clues. We even grabbed a few of the teachers from the school, force fed them veritaserum, then obliviated them when we were done, but they knew nothing of use to the investigation. As much as I'd like to resolve this matter, it's going nowhere. I know Mister Malfoy has been pushing for answers, but I'm sorry to say we just don't have any," Dawlish said, then he flipped his parchment over.

"On the matter of Severus Snape, he confessed to making a number of illegal mind controlling potions and raping at least seven girls in the past decade. All of the girls came from Slytherin House. I have tentatively scheduled a full trial in front of the Wizengamot for the fifteenth of March. Some of the girls involved come from politically powerful families.

"Finally, we still have a 'hold for questioning' on Albus Dumbledore, but he hasn't been seen since he vanished. He is in contact with Minerva McGonagall, but he hasn't revealed his whereabouts to her. Since it's likely he left by phoenix, he could be anywhere in the world. We know he's using his familiar to contact her, but phoenixes can't be spelled with tracking charms, nor can they carry any item spelled with such a charm. The magic of the beast negates them."

"That blasted old man!" spat Umbridge. "With him gone, the school is out of our hands. Smythe is still at St. Mungo's. He was the best candidate we had to replace Dumbledore."

Cornelius turned to her. "What would you have us do, Delores? Our best people have analyzed the situation, and short of storming the castle and ripping out the ward stone, the place is completely untouchable. And I think we all know that the castle won't let anyone near the ward stone."

"Let me take our new Wizard Defense Forces into the school," Umbridge urged.

Cornelius held up a hand. "Delores, they aren't trained to fight around other wizards, especially children. The Wizengamot would have our heads or order us killed within a day of learning we attacked the castle. No, the school will have to remain as it is for now."

Cornelius looked away from Delores, who wasn't looking very happy with him. "What I want to know," he said, "is what's happening with our plans for Gringotts? I received word today from St. Mungo's that they can attribute twenty deaths to the lack of dragon based ingredients for potions. They are researching replacements, but they're finding it a very difficult task."

"The crisis is world wide. at this point. The Americans claim over two hundred dead in their hospitals and the French have twenty eight dead. The Australians sent two hundred aurors against one of their reserves and they got mauled. They retreated after an hour long battle that left eighty percent of their force injured, in some cases with crippling injuries."

"I won't even go into the impact it's having on the economy. Those Goblins now own the sole source of dragon products still moving and even they aren't shipping potion ingredients."

Delores looked down at her notes. "We have two hundred and twenty wizards in the WDF now. I hope to have at least five hundred before we take on Gringotts. Next week, a series of advertisements will run in the Daily Prophet, looking for more people. To make it more appealing, we've designed a very fashionable uniform."

Several people around the room winced. Delores thought a bright pink cardigan was the height of fashion. They were afraid to see what she considered a fashionable uniform.

"Good, good," murmured Cornelius.

"Cornelius, in order to keep our actions legal, I've drawn up several laws that we'll need to get passed through the Wizengamot," she added.

He frowned. New legislation always gave him a headache. "Very well. Leave me copies of the laws and we'll see what we can do to slip them onto the docket."

Delores smiled and nodded eagerly. It may take a bit, but soon most non-human species were going to be reclassified as beasts.

Prime Minister's home, #10 Downing Street, London, February 25th...

It was late when the car pulled up and Sir Robert and Lord Mills stepped from the vehicle, then into the building. Both men had received a urgent summons and were flown, via dragon back, to a nearby deserted airfield the government where a car was waiting for them.

In short order both men were hustled into the Prime Minister's private quarters and into a very plush private office.

Prime Minister John Major looked up from his conversation with a gray haired man and smiled tightly at the pair. "Ah, Sir Robert and Lord Mills. Just the men we need."

The two approached with some degree of confusion. "Sir?" asked James. He had only rarely spoke with the PM, and never in so intimate a setting.

"Gentlemen, allow me to introduce Ambassador Madison of the United States of America. He came here this morning with some concerns. After consulting with her Majesty, we feel it would be within the interests of our nation to share some of what you two gentlemen have been working on."

Madison stood and offered his hand.

"Ambassador, Sir Robert March, our chief government scientific advisor, and Lord James Mills, member of Parliament and the man who brought the current situation to our attention," the Prime Minister said, then he turned to the two men. "Ambassador Madison is already familiar with the wizards, gentlemen. By order of the President, he was personally brief by their Department of Magic. Unlike our wizards, theirs feel a certain loyalty to their nation and their government."

It was impossible to miss the bitter tone in Major's voice. The fact that they cast spells on him to control him pissed him off greatly.

Madison turned to the Prime Minister and arched an eyebrow.

"Sir," Lord Mills said softly, catching his attention, "roughly three months ago I caught a young lad who was buying my flocks late at night. He was paying for them, so he wasn't a thief, but his reason for his midnight purchases brought us to this point. Our world stands on the brink of a war with the wizards because of what we've learned.

"The lad turned out to be the human leader of a race of non-human sentient creatures," Sir Robert added.

The Ambassador blinked in surprise. So few things surprised him in his line of work. This, however, was one of them, and it was the last thing he'd expected to hear.

"The creatures can communicate with people and people with them," James said. "They think, they feel, they know they exist. By

every definition of intelligence I can find, they are no different than you and I, except that they aren't human."

Madison frowned. "But this is stupendous news! I fail to see why there's a problem."

"The problem, Ambassador," Major said quietly, "is that the wizarding world uses these creatures like livestock. They are treated worse than the slaves of your history, or the slaves we once had. These creatures are beautiful, though a bit scary looking, and very gentle. Yet the wizarding world harvests them for ingredients like we do cows or sheep. And when confronted with the reality of their intelligence, the wizards deny it.

"And if that isn't bad enough, I made the mistake of trying to work my way around to the topic with what I thought was our Minister for Magic, a man I thought was working for us. Instead, I learned later that I had been cursed and the person I was meeting with wasn't the Minister at all, but some lucky."

Sir Robert reached into his briefcase, pulled out a stack of photos and passed over to the Ambassador.

The man spent several minutes shuffling through photos of Harry working with the dragons and several of the new riders and their dragonettes.

Madison shook his head and his frown deepened. "Dragons," he exclaimed, then he looked up from the photos. "There's a lot going on here that troubles me, sir. For one thing, I do not know if my country has any of these dragons, either as livestock or imported at need. I think this is something I need to speak personally with my President about."

"I'm afraid to say that you do have dragons, sir," Sir Robert said seriously. "During the recent hatching, one of the clutching females was treated for a painful infection and cavity in her mouth. She identified herself as coming from the Knik Glacier Reserve in Alaska. What I don't know for certain is who controls that reserve. I do know that all of the reserves are rebelling, at this point.

"Wizards have tried assaulting them and have been rebuffed every time. The only reserve still operating normally is one in Tibet, and

that reserve served as a conservation reserve. The dragons there were left to live their lives without interference."

The Ambassador made a few notes on a pad, "Thank you for the information, but I probably still need to speak with my President."

He paused, staring down at his notes for a moment, then looked at Sir Robert. "How many dragons are we talking about here?"

"I estimate the population to fluctuate between seven thousand and ten thousand dragons. The group led by our Harry is five hundred and thirty five strong now. The humans working with them are a mix of normal humans like yourself and wizards. All of those involved have an unbreakable allegiance to the dragons."

Madison raised an eyebrow at that. An unbreakable allegiance was an unknown concept to him, but he pressed on anyway. "And all of these herds or flocks are fighting back now?"

"Yes, sir, they are," replied James Mills.

Madison swore mentally. If he compared the concept of dragons to cows, he knew the loss of the cow stocks would destroy the world economy. Having grown up in Iowa, he was intimately familiar with the industry. If dragons were anything like cows to the wizards, their economies had to be tanking, big time.

"Sir, I'm going to suggest caution here. If your wizards have been doing what ours are doing, then you're in danger just knowing what you know. When you talk with your President, you really should keep it as private as possible," James suggested.

Madison nodded unhappily. This wasn't going to make the boss happy at all. He turned to the Prime Minister. "He's probably going to want to talk to you, as well, but if our security has been compromised..."

He trailed off, frowning. If they were compromised they had a major problem on their hands. For years it had been assumed that the Department of Magic was subservient to the Federal Government, just like the US military. Even the possibility that it wasn't was enough to scare Madison.

"If need be, we can arrange for the Prime Minister and your President to meet in secret," James offered.

The Ambassador and the Prime Minister looked at him in shock and he shrugged. "A dragon can travel anywhere in the world, instantly. A rider can easily take the Prime Minister here to a meeting place and no one would know anything more than both of them were out of the office for a few hours."

Sir Robert nodded in approval. "Yes, I'm quite sure they would be happy to help. The dragons are eager to earn themselves a place in the world as our partners, so they are quite willing to help out wherever they can."

Madison stood and turned to the Prime Minister. "Thank you, Mister Prime Minister. Once again your country has proven itself to be a friend of ours. You've given me some dire information and I think I should make arrangements to meet with my President as soon as possible."

John Major nodded agreeably. "I wish it were under better circumstances, Ambassador, but it's always a pleasure to deal with you."

The Ambassador turned to the others. "Thank you, gentlemen. I'll be in touch."

They waited until the Ambassador left the room, then Lord Mills turned to the Prime Minister. "Save the security tape of this meeting. If the Ambassador returns from Washington and doesn't come to see you, you can show him the tape and it will be proof that his government is compromised. If they've been compromised, he'll likely have his memory altered, much like yours was, sir."

John Major shuddered. The idea of wizards controlling the Americans frightened him. "Quite so," he murmured unhappily.

Campbeltown Weyr, Administration building, March 1st...

Harry stepped into the room and peeled off his hat and gloves, then unzipped his flight jacket. Several of the adults looked up in surprise. They hadn't expected him to be at the Weyr today.

"Harry, I thought you'd still be working with the new riders," Sirius said.

Harry grimaced and ran a hand through his hair. "I got word from Polenth today and the Goblins are getting very agitated about something. He didn't understand it, but he said the Goblins have been reinforcing some of the weaker areas of the vault system."

Albus nodded. "Yes, I can see why. This is why the Goblins are upset," he said, offering the Daily Prophet to Harry.

Harry picked up the paper and looked at it.

"What you want is on page four," Sirius told him.

He turned the pages and then stopped. He saw it immediately, of course. It was a full page advertisement for the Wizard Defense Force, promising an exciting career with the government and touted many attractive benefits.

He grimaced at the ugly uniform that looked like it was designed to hinder movement, not enable it. Even he knew you didn't want a bulky outfit when trying to fight.

He stared at the page for a full minute while ideas played out in his head, then he looked up at the others. "We need to get Lord Mills and Sir Robert here. As official representatives of the Muggle government, I need them here before I do anything else."

"What do you have in mind, Harry?" asked Albus.

He looked at his former Headmaster. "I intend to offer an alliance to the Goblins. Dragons will come to their aid if attacked, but I don't want to offend our muggle friends, either. I want them aware of what is transpiring and what the dragon nation is going to do about it."

"Nation?" exclaimed Sirius.

"Nation," Harry stated firmly. "We have two choices here, people. We can either be servants to the muggle society or we can be equals within that society. The dragons and their riders will be

equals, always. We may not have a land of our own, but we'll be like any aboriginal human group: A separate nation within a nation."

Albus nodded in approval. "Yes, the Native Americans and First Nations People have a similar situation and they have managed to maintain at least some of their independence. I think it's a sound idea, Harry."

He nodded. "Thank you, Albus," he said softly. "I got the idea from reading some books Mister Granger provided on political history. If you think Binns was boring, you should read these books. They were somewhat useful, however."

He stood and walked to a window while Sirius hunted down the others who were in the Weyr. When the door opened again, he turned to Sir Robert and Lord Mills, nodding in greeting to them both.

"Lord Mills," Harry began formally. His tone caught everyone's attention. "It is my intention to offer to the Goblins of Gringotts a gesture of friendship and alliance. Should the wizards and their new Wizard Defense Force attack Gringotts, the dragon nation will come to their aid."

James blinked hard and stared at Harry.

"Nation?" whispered Sir Robert.

"Nation," repeated Harry. "Sirs, we are grateful in the extreme to her Majesty and her government, but the one thing no one has recognized as yet is that the dragons represent a nation of people. We may not have a homeland anymore, but we are no different than any other Native American or Inuit people."

Lord Mills nodded slowly. "So, you're basically forcing us to recognize that you represent a people."

"Right now, you're just looking at us as a resource to exploit," Harry countered firmly, leaving little room for argument. "The dragons of Earth are willing to help provide that resource. In exchange, however, we ask for formal recognition."

"Harry," stammered James. "I can't agree to this without talking to someone. This is too big for me."

Harry nodded. "I understand, James, but time is becoming critical here. Things are happening that are out of our control."

Sir Robert looked around intently. "What's happened?"

Albus passed the paper to Sir Robert, who quickly spotted the problem.

"They are raising an army? They can't!"

"No, Sir Robert, they can't, but that isn't stopping them," Harry said. "Polenth told me the Goblins are reinforcing their wards and are very agitated, almost as if they expect an attack. There is a place for the underground dragons at Disko if they need to evacuate Gringotts. I want to offer the Goblins assistance if they're attacked. I fear that the Goblins could be forced into submitting to the wizards, even aiding them against the dragons."

"I need to call the PM," James said quietly.

"Has the American Ambassador returned from Washington yet?" asked Sir Robert.

"I don't think so," replied James.

"What's this?" asked Harry.

"The Americans got wind of some of what we're doing. They don't have all the facts, but they had heard about our research into a new energy source and wanted to know more. As we started to explain to the Ambassador about our problems with the Wizards, it became apparent that the Americans could have the same problem we have. We thought the Ministry of Magic was working within the constraints of our laws."

"And if they aren't?" asked Albus.

"Then it's likely that the American Ambassador has had his memory erased like Prime Minister Major did. If he doesn't come back to the Prime Minister with information, or doesn't come back looking for more information, we'll have to assume that the Department of

Magic is controlling the American government," James replied unhappily.

No one wanted to consider what they'd do in that case.

"I might be able to help a bit with that," Albus said. He reached into a drawer and pulled out a box and opened it.

"If you recall, Lord Mills, I asked you to purchase these silver bracelets. I have enchanted them with a simple alarm spell. What they do is sound an alarm several hours after the wearer has been bespelled," Albus said.

Sirius pulled a bracelet from the box and examined it. "Sweet. So if someone obliviates you, an hour or two later they make some sort of noise?"

"Yes. I put in the delay to allow the caster time to leave the scene. No one casting that spell is going to want to stick around to be remembered again," Albus replied.

"Who did you make these for?" asked James.

Albus lifted his hands and shrugged. "With the problems of muggles being bespelled, I thought you might find a use for these."

James smiled, "Thank you, Albus. I'll see that the Prime Minister and her Majesty get one today. The rest I'll find uses for."

Albus nodded. "If you need more, I'll need more bracelets. They should be silver or gold. Platinum would work as well or any alloy of those metals."

James nodded and took the box from the old man. The bracelets would be a great help.

"James, I'll hold off meeting with the Goblins for now, but please stress with your Prime Minister that we are running short on time. I'm not asking for anything other than recognition. We'll still be here to produce your hot rocks. We'll be here for other things, as well, but I'd really like to see us as partners and not a resource to cultivate or exploit."

James nodded. "I'll convey that to him, Harry. I can't promise any more than that."

"Harry," Sir Robert said in a pained voice. "Can you call them something other than hot rocks? We've been calling them Slow Decline Thermal Sources or SDTS."

"I liked Hot Rocks!" exclaimed Sirius.

Harry glanced at Albus, who seemed to be struggling to hold back laughter and he lost it. He started to laugh, which kicked off Dumbledore, then Sirius.

Sir Robert stared at the three then turned to a smiling Lord Mills. "What did I say?"

Between. What it is, is unknown. Science tried to study Between for over a decade before coming to the realization that the technology simply didn't exist that allowed any study to take place. What we do know about between is very simple. It's a place that isn't here. It's very cold and other than the cold, there appears to be no recordable or measurable phenomena that might let us understand it better. Finally, we do know it was an ability which came from the fire lizards of Pern.

Excerpted from The Weyrs of Earth by Remus John Lupin, published 2040.

Author's Notes, replies, and mockeries:

- If you ask a question in a review and have your pms turned off, then don't expect an answer. Just know that the entire world is laughing at you and praying you do not procreate. Some genes aren't meant to be passed on. Darksnider05, you had a question that will now never get answered. Too bad I KNOW THE ANSWER TO IT TOO!

- We know who is going to be paired with whom in this story. While its nice to know you find Harry and Hermione to be the tops or Harry and Luna or even Harry and Bellatrix, the simple fact is your wishes don't matter. Hookup information is stored in my plot file and no one will see that.

- Dragons in space? Not anytime soon and not until a lot of technical issues are resolved. Probably not in this story. Harry won't endanger his dragons.

- Snake7896321. Don't like, don't read. THIS IS FICTION. Look it up and you'll find NO WHERE in the definition of fiction does it say it needs to be accurate. And while you're waving around engineering degrees, see that? That's me waving my engineering degree right back at you. Either enjoy the free story or hit your back button. Sheesh!

- To the person that didn't like the name Clarence. Well shucks, next time I'll name the hat Kadiddlehoffer eh? If I were a thinking hat I'd probably change my name at least once a decade, just because its something else to think about besides writing a one time use song.

- RobC weyr do you get off punning like that? People have died for less.

- For all those complaining about Umbridge's name being spelled wrong. Well actually we took the issue to a Feng Shui expert who changed the name. Said her Chi was all wrong and it had to be changed. Sorry for the confusion. Er.. actually no we're not sorry, but it sounded good.

- Sorry Tumshie.

- Maximillan1 I don't know what you called me with those Japanese characters, but I should warn you, Alyx is planning on sending you a samurai Llama via DHL. I told her you were commenting on her nipples and I couldn't repeat it in public. You're doomed. Run.

And finally...

There, we have the first real Weyr on the planet. Things are starting to move on that front, but we still have a long haul to go.

Cast of Bonded/Non-bonded dragons seen prior to the hatching:

Sidraneth, the original Pern queen that came to earth, Fara was her rider.

Spath the elder, the oldest dragon alive.

Momnarth, Mother of Chekiath

Chekiath, Harry's Horntail

Selanth, aka Norbet, Hagrid's dragon.

Norendrath, Romanian Longhorn, friend of Smelly Dog

Polenth, leader of the Gringotts dragon clans.

A list of Riders and their dragons will be posted to our Yahoo Group in a day or two. You'll find the URL to the group in our profile if you don't know it.

zStandard Disclaimer:

Bob was busy typing when Alyx bounded into the room and pushed his monitor, keyboard and computer off his desk. The equipment fell with a crash and a shower of sparks.

He looked up and glared at her. "Do you know what you've done? I just got to the good part where Godzilla was about to step on Dumbledore! And Snape was still handcuffed to the railing of the Titanic!"

"You've rewritten that scene one hundred and fifty three times and each time its gotten more outlandish and bizarre? Why couldn't you just go with my idea," she whined.

Bob clenched his teeth, then realized he couldn't speak well with clenched teeth, so he pulled out Georgie his trusty sock puppet.

"Because your idea had Dumbledore strapped to the front grill of a semi truck and entered into a demolition derby while you and multiple Snapes sipped Pina Coladas from a hot tub and watched the race. You know I was planning on entering you in the demolition derby for your birthday!" Georgie said.

"I know," she purred, "and I do appreciate it, I just don't understand why you won't let me use the truck."

"Ummm it's a non-vehicular demolition derby," Bob said, thinking fast. "Do you know that now we have no disclaimer? I mean it was nearly finished and stored on my machine."

Alyx looked at the smoking wreckage of his computer. "Oh well... look on the bright side, now I won't have to edit your files anymore. No more deleting sex scenes with penguins, no more scaring small children. More Wow time for me!"

Bob glared at her. "How are we supposed to tell the minions we don't own Harry Potter or the Dragon Riders of Pern? You know how angry they get! Look at them!"

Alyx glanced out at the audience and blinked, then she replaced her false eye with her real one and took another look. She stepped back in fear. "They look hungry."

Bob nodded. "Yep, there was a mix up with another fan fiction story and we got stuck with a zombie audience."

"Start the story! Start the story!" Alyx screeched as the audience began to shuffle forward.

"Brains," moaned the zombies.

Bob pushed Alyx into the crowd of hungry zombies. "Enjoy the chapter folks!" he shouted, then he ran for his CDC approved zombie apocalypse shelter.

Dragons have wings and therefore some ability to fly, but inbreeding and long disuse has caused that ability to erode to the point where most dragons in the reserves are unable to leave via flight. Superior wizarding wards restrain them from escaping. The dragons of today, while still dangerous, are much like the domesticated bull; dangerous, but controllable.

Excerpt from *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find them* by Newt Scamander. Published 1927.

The Hatching Weyr, Disko Island Greenland, March 1st...

Hermione stumbled into the main meeting tent and May waved her over.

"I finally found and closed all of the holes in that wall," she murmured. She had been using her magic to build a door over the face of her Weyr so it wouldn't be so chilly.

"Can you do the same for me?" asked May eagerly. "I don't mind camping and roughing it, but it's downright cold in there most of the time. The only nice thing is that the floor is smooth and warm so I can go barefoot. It's better than what Harry has in that regard."

Unlike Harry's Weyr, the Weyrs created for the new riders were bored out by dragon fire. They had smooth walls and floors and everything had a heat fired glaze to it. The quarters weren't plush by any means, but they were comfortable. The problem was that they had used canvas to cover the opening and that just let all that cold winter air in.

Harry's Weyr, being naturally made by an ancient lava flow, was larger than the others, but there were few smooth areas on the floor. Chekiath had blasted the floor in several spots when they first lived in that Weyr, smoothing out those areas, but it really was just a cave.

Hermione had transfigured the canvas into wooden planking and then made a door opening similar to a cat flap for Comaloth to use. Since the Weyrs were meant to be temporary housing for new riders before returning to Campbeltown, the coverings didn't have to be that elaborate.

"I'll get together with the others and see what we can do to put airtight coverings on every Weyr," she said, then she looked up and smiled at Susan Bones who joined them at the table. A few moments later they had several other girls also joining them.

"Has anyone seen Harry today?" asked Mariah.

"Comaloth said that he and Chekiath left very early this morning," Hermione offered. She didn't know what Harry was up to and that bothered her a bit. For four years their lives had been deeply entwined, but now they seemed to be going their separate ways.

"He's working really hard," Susan said. "The other day I found him nearly asleep in a bowl of stew."

"Can't we take some of the burden off him? He is not the only rider anymore," said Mariah.

"Harry will work until he drops. He isn't the type to ask for help," Hermione said softly. "I didn't recognize it at the time, but he was raised to be very independent. He doesn't really rely on anyone. When someone does help him,, he's almost always surprised by it."

May snorted and several girls turned to her. She was about to speak when Harry stepped into the room still wearing his flight gear. He slowly pulled off his goggles and gloves. He walked over to the table with the large pot of tea and poured himself a cup.

Hermione waved and he gave her a weak smile in return, then he walked over and sat down next to her.

"We missed you at the morning class today," Mariah said.

He shrugged, "Four of the unbonded potentials have asked to go home. All four want to come back when its time for the next impression. I took them back to Campbeltown and reminded them that they signed confidentiality agreements. Lord Mills then reminded them that breaking that agreement would result in a prison sentence. Lisa Turpin asked to remain. Apparently there is some sort of marriage contract waiting for her if she returns. It might not be possible for her to return if she went back to Hogwarts. And I had to give a clear message to our British hosts, so I needed to speak to White Beard."

"White Beard?" exclaimed Hermione. "Harry, you're not a dragon!"

He sighed and shook his head. "Sorry, I needed to talk to Dumbledore about the goblins."

"What kind of message did you want to send to our hosts?" asked Susan.

Harry eyed her for a moment, "I want them to recognize the dragons as a nation, just like any other native human tribe. We are not going to be a resource they can cultivate for their benefit unless we get some concessions from them."

Susan and May both looked thoughtful, but Hermione was clearly appalled. Luna seemed unconcerned and Mariah just appeared to be confused. She was a sweet girl, but she reminded Harry of Lavender Brown, though a bit smarter.

"Are you sure you want to go that way, Harry?" asked Hermione a bit timidly.

Harry looked at her for a moment then he leaned forward. "Right now, the British see us as a solution to their power problems. We are literally the next OPEC in the making, Hermione. Think about that for a moment. The potential exists for us to wake up one morning to discover the British Army has moved into Campbeltown and taken over. We have one overriding priority now and that is to our dragons. I want to work with the British, but we'll do it on our terms, as partners, or I'll pack up the entire Weyr and we'll go find a country that is willing to work with us."

"You didn't say that to them did you?" asked Hermione in alarm.

"He didn't need to," replied May.

Susan nodded in understanding. "Yes, the threat is implied. He didn't need to say it. It took a lot of guts to make that demand."

Harry shrugged. "I don't want to be an employee of someone else. The dragons are no different than any other native tribe. In fact, if you listen to Sir Robert, there's a good chance that the dragons actually predate modern humanity."

Hermione leaned back and thought about it while he tiredly sipped at his tea.

"Harry," May said, "when was the last time you had eight hours of sleep?"

He shrugged a reply. In truth, he couldn't remember.

"Harry," Luna said gently, "we're all riders now. Can't we help with some of your workload? After all, what will we be doing once our dragons have grown up, besides hunting for Snorkacks?"

He sighed and ran a hand through his hair tiredly. "I suppose you're right, Luna, but..."

"But you've been doing it by yourself for so long you don't know how to ask for help," Hermione finished for him.

He glanced up at her and grimaced, then nodded.

"I'll speak to Remus about divvying up the workload tomorrow," he finally said.

"Good. Too much work makes you vulnerable to the Rotfangs. And while I like the Grangers, I wouldn't want them working on me," Luna said.

Hermione blinked and turned her attention to Luna. "Rotfangs? Bad teeth?" she exclaimed.

"Didn't you know?" asked Susan. "I thought everyone knew that Rotfangs were tooth problems."

"Daddy writes about the Rotfang Conspiracy all the time. It's well known that the Ministry promotes bad behavior because they heavily tax the Rotfang potion," Luna said.

Harry grinned at his friend and shook his head. Only the wizards could think up something so silly.

#10 Downing Street, London, March 1st...

The secretary opened the door and frowned at the old man with his ridiculously long beard as he passed her.

The meeting was a first for Dumbledore and he had transfigured his outfit into a very nice leisure suit, although the deep purple was a little bit alarming.

Prime Minister John Major looked up at the three arrivals and he arched an eyebrow at the unknown man. He turned to Lord Mills looking for an explanation.

"Sir, may I introduce you to Albus Dumbledore, the former Chief Warlock of the Wizengamot? I asked him here today because he has a depth of experience with the Wizards unparalleled to anything we can come up with.

"He is also living at MOD Campbeltown, under the protection of the dragons there. There was sufficient reason for him to believe that the current Minister for Magic was out to silence him and his opposition to Ministry policies.

"Mr. Dumbledore can also offer insight into the motives and reasoning of Harry Potter," James said quietly.

"You're really a wizard?" blurted Major.

Albus smiled softly. "A lesson then, sir," he said, then he held up a hand and a ball of fire appeared in it. "A good wizard is not constrained by a lack of a wand. I'll admit, my magic isn't as powerful or as controlled as it would be if I used my wand, but I can

still cast some formidable spells. Please remember that when dealing with my kind."

Albus closed his hand and the fire vanished.

Major swallowed a bit nervously and nodded. It was his first real experience with magic that he could remember.

"I presume, gentlemen, that you are here for a reason, then?" he asked after composing himself.

"Yes, sir, we are here about this," James said, passing the Daily Prophet over to him.

The Prime Minister raised an eyebrow over the strange feel of the paper, then he noted the advertisement and scowled. He reached for the phone and picked it up.

"Marjorie, contact Lord Kennewick and tell him I need to see him today. No excuses," he said gruffly. He listened for a moment, then nodded to himself. "Thank you."

Sir Robert and Lord Mills looked at each other uneasily. Lord Kennewick was the Minister of Defense.

Placing the handset back on the receiver, he turned to Dumbledore. "If I understand rightly, you held a high rank in that Ministry."

Albus nodded.

"Then what in the blazes are they doing over there? This bit with them raising a military is against every agreement we ever had with them!" exclaimed Major.

Albus sighed and removed his glasses to clean them. "Mr. Prime Minister, in order to understand our current Ministry, you must understand a bit of where we're coming from. May I?"

Major nodded and Albus placed his glasses back on his face. "I am one hundred and fifty two years old. I know I look closer to seventy five, but it's the truth. In my youth, Queen Victoria sat on the throne and the sun never set on the British Empire.

"I remember a time when steam powered trains and horses were the most common forms of transportation, and the British Navy still ruled the seas with sailing ships. We are a long lived people, sir, and because of that we have a long memory. We remember the time when normal Britain lived in little more than mud huts, while Wizards had fine homes. We remember when we removed ourselves from your society because you blamed everything, even eclipses, comets and the plague on witches and hunted us without mercy.

"A few of us knew you were changing, growing and passing us, but most thought we were superior because we knew bathing was important centuries before you did. There was once a time when Wizarding Society was far ahead of your society and we were smug about it. In a way, the primary difference between our two worlds, sir, is that your society changed and grew and ours did not. We stagnated. When I, and others, tried to point out that fact, we were ignored.

"I have seen your society change drastically. Some of those changes have been horrific and some changes wonderful. And the pace at which those changes have come is truly astonishing. I look back and can honestly say that the way I lived in 1901 is pretty much the same way I lived until recently."

Albus paused and conjured a cup of tea for himself, then he smiled and conjured three more cups. "If you can understand that, at one time, our society was better than yours, then maybe you can understand that for a thousand years, wizards have believed that to be a fact without looking to see how you have changed. The Ministry for Magic believes they are superior. They are convinced of it and will ignore any evidence to the contrary."

He took a sip of his tea and thought for a moment. "I suppose that is another crime to lay at my feet. As the Headmaster for our biggest school, I suppose I should have tried to educate the students about the realities of our world. Unfortunately, the Ministry wouldn't allow it and I didn't fight them hard enough."

Major stared at Albus for a long time before nodding. "All right, I can see what you're saying. The big question is what do we do about it? They are forming an army. I can't allow someone to build an army on our soil."

"Harry is convinced that the army isn't aimed at you," Albus said. "And frankly, I think he's right."

Major stared at him incredulously.

"Sir, the wizarding world contains a number of species that are in a similar situation as the dragons. Some of these species are intelligent, but simplistic in their outlook. Others are as complex as humans. One such group are the goblins, who the wizarding world has fought on a number of occasions.

"Always in the past, the conflicts were organized by wizards or the Ministry. The battles were small skirmishes, really. We've never had a real standing army before and our Auror force was designed to serve the same role as your Scotland Yard, not to fight wars. In each goblin war, the Wizards lost to overwhelming numbers. This is a prime example of what I mean by the Wizards denying the truth. For the past ninety seven years it has been a direct policy of the Ministry of Magic to tell the public that we won those wars when, in fact, we lost every single time. Harry believes the Wizard Defense Forces are being formed to attack the goblins because they still have dragons and have reached an accommodation with Harry and his dragons."

Major frowned. "They've reached an accommodation with the dragons?" he repeated.

James Mills looked uncomfortable and he nodded. "Yes, sir, and that brings us to our second reason for our visit. Harry wants the British Government to recognize the dragons as a nation, just like we recognize some native groups."

Major scowled. Recognition on such a scale would automatically invoke protections and rights upon the dragons that he wasn't sure he wanted to grant.

"Mister Prime Minister," Sir Robert said quietly, "the dragons represent the sole source of a nearly limitless supply of energy. Harry was quite clear in his desire to see dragons recognized as a nation. The dragons are eager to help, but they will go where Harry says and they will follow his orders. He didn't come out and say it, but I suspect that if we don't do this, Harry will go shopping for a country that will. Right now, we stand on the verge of an economic

bonanza, but it will only work if we treat dragons as partners, not as employees, servants, or slaves."

"But he's British!" protested Major.

"Sir, if I may explain?" said Albus sadly.

Major reached for his tea and motioned to the old man to speak.

"As I have said, I'm an old man and I've made a great many mistakes in my life. But none of those do I regret more than my involvement in placing Harry with his Aunt and Uncle after his parents were murdered. His Aunt and Uncle didn't want Harry. At best, they were indifferent to him. At worst, they were abusive. I believe the truth lies somewhere in between, but only Harry, his Aunt and his Uncle know for sure. To my knowledge, he has never spoken to anyone about his time with them.

"As a result, he holds no love for this country, its halls of power or its symbols, including the Queen. He holds no particular allegiance to the wizards, either. He was denied the chance to connect to the wizarding world by me. A mistake I shall always regret. His relatives denied him a chance to connect to your world. Harry Potter has just one allegiance today, and that allegiance is to his dragons. Everything he does, every action he takes is to better the lives of his dragons. I believe, quite firmly now, that he'd die happily today if it meant his dragons would be treated with dignity and respect."

Albus paused, and looked thoughtful. "What he wants is to know that you'll look him in the eye and treat him as a friend. Friends can help each other and profit from their friendship. That's what he wants. He is a proud man, and a dragon rider who will not bend his knee to anyone."

Major sighed heavily and shook his head. "I was afraid for a moment that he was making demands. He is, in a way, but his demand isn't unreasonable. Please tell Mister Potter that I will try to do as he requests. It's not something I can easily do without getting a lot more people involved and it might end up being delayed while arrangements are made. But he has my promise that I will do everything in my power to recognize dragons as a nation."

Sir Robert and James Mills exchanged relieved looks.

Albus chuckled. "Poor Harry. In his youth, he rushes ahead, never realizing that a nation must have a Head of State to lead it. Like it or not, he is it."

James smirked. "I'll let you tell him that, Albus."

"Thanks," Dumbledore said, dryly.

Major coughed and looked at the three. "What about these goblins? Harry..." he paused. "What is his title, then? I can't exactly call him King of the dragons."

"Weyrleader, sir," replied Sir Robert.

Major nodded and rolled around the unfamiliar word in his head. "So, you said the Weyrleader has reached an accord with these goblins. What else?"

"Harry stopped the goblins from killing the dragons," James said, "then he arranged for the dragons to continue working with the goblins, providing non-lethal business opportunities. The goblins are a highly organized and very mercantile group, if I understand them rightly. Like the wizards, they weren't willing to admit dragons were sentient until Harry forced them to acknowledge it.

"Now the wizards are forming an army and he wants to offer the goblins assistance. Dragons can be used to help evacuate the goblins, or they can and will fight at Harry's command. He doesn't really want them fighting unless it's absolutely necessary."

Major nodded and looked unhappy. This mess was expanding at an alarming rate! First dragons, now goblins and there were hints of other groups being oppressed by the wizards. He thought for a moment longer, then he stood and made his decision.

"Please ask Weyrleader Potter if it would be acceptable to have someone from my office attend his meeting with the goblins. If there are other races being suppressed by the wizards, we are going to want to reach out to them and offer them similar protections," he said.

"I don't think Harry would have any problems with that," Sir Robert mused.

Major still looked unhappy. "Gentlemen, I'm going to be frank with you. I understand what we're dealing with, but a fourteen year old Head of State makes me uneasy."

"Would a Regency Council be more suitable? At least until Harry reaches his majority?" asked Albus.

"Yes," mused Major, "a council would work and it wouldn't take anything away from Harry. Suggest it to him, please. Her Majesty's government would feel more comfortable dealing with adults."

"We'll do that, sir," replied James.

"Sir, if I may, what about the Americans?" asked Sir Robert.

Major scowled. "Ambassador Madison returned from Washington yesterday and I have not yet heard from him. As of now, we're thinking that the Americans may be compromised. Needless to say, it's caused a great deal of concern over here and we're looking into our options. I still hold hope that Ambassador Madison will ask for a meeting, but if I don't hear from him soon, I must assume the worst."

"If you need help from the dragons," James offered.

"Or from us Wizards," added Albus.

Major nodded. "Thank you, gentlemen, I'll take it into consideration."

Recognizing the dismissal, the three men filed from the room. Major watched them for a moment longer, then he returned to his desk. Lord Kennewick would be there shortly and he needed to discuss increasing the MOD security levels, as well as informing him that the Americans were compromised. In short, the MOD was about to become a beehive of activity.

I wonder how many other governments are compromised? he mused.

The Hatching Weyr, Disko Island Greenland, March 3rd...

Harry walked into the main meeting tent and he looked pleased to see everyone present. Yesterday he had met for a long time with Dumbledore and had come away both pleased and appalled by what he had learned.

He looked at the sea of assembled faces. Hagrid gave him an encouraging grin and he smiled back. He was truly someone Harry loved, both as his first friend and as the person who gave him Hedwig.

"Good morning," he said in a clear voice.

"In light of recent events and new information recently received, I am going to implement some changes. Our British hosts at Campbeltown have heard my request to grant us a similar status as if we were a displaced nation of people. In short, dragons will be recognized as a group to be no different than any native tribe that maintains a level of independence."

He paused while several murmured in approval. "For you people who are not riders, this means you live within the sanctuary and protection of the Dragon Nation. Perhaps someday we'll even offer citizenship. For now, however, you're welcome to continue with us and help us. In return, we'll shelter and help you.

"For you riders, I think we all know where our loyalties lie. I am a dragon rider. My responsibilities are to all riders and dragons of this world. After that, I'm British and a Wizard."

He paused again and looked over at the adults who were watching and listening closely. "The Prime Minister has expressed a desire for a formal Regent, or Regency Council, to govern the Weyr until I reach my majority. Regretfully, I cannot allow that," he said heavily.

Remus stood. "Harry!" he exclaimed.

Harry glared at his friend. "Sit!" he commanded, unknowingly lacing his voice with magic. Remus sat immediately and then looked stunned.

"Now, if you'll let me finish, I'll explain myself. A Regent, or a Regency Council, will never work for us because the dragons will not follow any order that isn't given by myself or another rider. And

the dragons will only follow my orders. Luna can tell her Trandieth what to do, but Selanth will not follow her orders without confirmation from Hagrid.

"I am very willing to accept an advisory council, but I will select our official spokesperson in dealing with the British Government. But I cannot cede power when it isn't mine to cede. I didn't want the role of Weyrleader, but I have it and have no way of giving it to anyone the dragons will accept. Spath and I spoke at length yesterday and he told me that, by his reasoning, only an heir from my line, or someone who can speak to all dragons, would be considered suitable as Weyrleader to them."

"Given that you're the only person out of thirty four riders who can talk to all dragons, I'd guess the odds of being able to talk to any dragon are pretty rare," Dan Granger said thoughtfully.

Harry nodded, his expression distasteful. He hated being singled out in any way. "Yes, Spath and I agreed on that point as well, Mister Granger."

"So, who do you want on this council of yours, Harry?" asked Albus.

Harry looked at the old man fondly. He had forgiven him for his mistakes. He knew that Dumbledore had no malicious intent towards him. Placing him at the Dursleys and the problems at Hogwarts were just what he said; mistakes he regretted.

"I've thought about this since you broached the subject with me yesterday, Albus. In fact, that and one other topic have been all I've thought about. For the Weyr council, which I intend to make into a permanent body, I'd like yourself, Lord James Mills, Sir Robert March and Mister Granger. To balance that out with some rider's perspectives, I'll ask Draco Malfoy and Karen Khan to also participate in the council."

Draco looked up in surprise. "Me?"

Harry nodded and smiled grimly. "We never got along at school and perhaps we'll go through our lives disliking each other. But I know for a fact that you would protect the Weyr and Sinnath with your life. I also know that you were raised in and around the worst of

wizarding politics, so you'll be able to offer advice on that aspect, as well."

Draco looked thoughtful for a moment, then nodded in acceptance.

"Karen, your rider's perspective with your non-wizard background will also be appreciated," Harry said softly. Karen was one of the quieter female riders.

When she smiled shyly, he turned his attention back to Albus. "Is that acceptable?"

Dumbledore looked among the named adults as he silently asked the question. One by one, each nodded in acceptance.

"It's not exactly what the Prime Minister had in mind, but I think we can see your point, Harry. You didn't seize a throne, but had it thrust upon you by circumstance," Albus said softly. "On behalf of myself and the others, I accept and I promise I will do my best to advise you to the benefit of the dragons and the Weyr."

Harry smiled. "Thank you, sir," he said softly, then he turned to the riders.

"It's been made plain to me in the last few days that I'm spreading myself too thin and working too hard. Spath and I agree that we cannot return to the Pern Weyr structure, but we can copy parts of it."

He paused and picked up a piece of paper. "Hagrid, from here on, you're going to be our Weyrling Master. It will be your job to help supervise and train the new riders. Since we're short handed still, you can continue as Weyrhealer while May McNulty trains with you for that role. May, I fully intend to see that money is set aside for that university you dreamed about. Veterinary science might be a bit offensive to our dragons, but a degree in that could be the basis for you training up our future Weyrhealers."

He looked at the others. "May is furthest along in dragon healing, but if any of you wish to also learn it, talk to May. She can organize it as a group effort."

"Mrs Granger, if you would continue working with Hagrid and acting as chaperone, I'd appreciate it," he said.

Emma looked up and nodded slowly. "Some of these girls are of age," she pointed out.

Harry grimaced. He knew what she was alluding to. "We are running a Weyr, not a prison. Any girl who has impressed does not need a chaperone, as her dragon would not permit anything to happen to her that she didn't want to happen. I ask that the advisory council to put together a policy we can put in place concerning relationships. Personally, I think the only thing we'd want to avoid is a dragon trying to impress a pregnant girl. Outside of that? I don't know. Just keep in mind that this is not a convent or a prison."

He glanced over at Sirius and hid a smirk. Sirius and Captain Atkins had an obvious attraction for each other and were trying very hard to ignore it. Harry was about to make that much harder.

"Sirius, I've spoken with Norendrath and he's happy to continue working with you. I know you're too old to be a true rider, but if you're interested, we could use you. I need someone to organize Weyr security, both here on Disko and at Campbeltown. You'd have to work closely with Captain Atkins, but sooner or later news of us is going to get out. I want us to have established working security so that when we need it, we have it."

Sirius shot him a thumbs up.

Harry looked over at Albus, "I realize this is an imposition, but can you also talk to Remus and Sirius about restarting magic lessons for our magical riders? I don't think we need worry about OWLs and NEWTS any longer, but I want to make sure that no one is a danger to themselves or others."

The old Headmaster nodded, his eyes gleaming.

"James," Harry said, turning to him, "I also want to find out about bringing tutors into the Weyr or taking the riders to them. I want all of our riders to be as educated as we can manage. I know Emma was working on that, but we need those tutors and we need to restart our classes as quickly as possible."

James nodded and made a note on a pad.

"Luna?" Harry said, turning back to the riders.

"Yes, Harry?"

He smiled at the girl. "I know we don't know each other very well, but Chekiath says you'd be perfect to head up the search for new riders. Please meet with the other riders and select at least seven others to help organize that search. I want to be able to present each hatching with at least forty candidates for the next couple years."

"I'd be happy to, Harry," Luna said with a smile. "Do you mind if we look for Snorkacks when we're not searching for riders?"

Harry chuckled. "Of course not, but don't let your dragon eat any until we're sure they aren't thinking creatures," he replied.

All of the riders laughed. Each of them had experienced their dragon's appetites and their curiosity over how things tasted.

"Hermione? You, Susan and Mariah are going to be sharing the traditional role of Head Woman of the Weyr. Disko Island in particular needs a lot of improvements to make it really usable. I can easily see a time when a hatching will include hundreds of eggs and candidates. We need to plan for that and put it together in stages.

"Finally, Hermione, Remus has been working with Spath to put together a history of dragons before they came to Earth, but you found Narth could give you memories of tenth century Britain. I'd like you compile those histories into a separate volume. Pick a few riders to help and talk to James about getting a few PCs at Campbeltown so we can type this stuff up."

"Millicent and Samuel, I would really like you both to spend some time working with Sir Robert to understand the value behind our hot rocks," he said, then paused and smiled as several chuckled. "I realize, Millie, that you are a witch and haven't been taught about these things. What I'm hoping is that, while you're learning, you may see things from a different perspective. That's something we can always take advantage of."

"If I haven't singled you out for anything specific and you think you can help one of the people I did single out, speak with them later. If you have other ideas, come see me later today and we'll talk about it. There's a lot of work to be done and not enough hands to do it, so everyone is going to be very busy for a while."

Harry looked around at the group of people staring at him, a bit bewildered. "Well, that's all I have to say. If you have any questions I'll be in my Weyr for the next few hours," he said, then he turned and walked from the room.

There was a moment of tense silence in the room.

"Harry makes a better leader than he thinks," Luna said with a laugh, breaking the tension. Harry had an unexpected effect on everyone present and many were still contemplating it.

"It's the bonding," Albus said firmly.

"Sir?" asked Hermione.

"We've just seen what Weyrleader Harry is like. He's commanding and confident, sure of himself and his position. Remus and I have spoken about the personality changes each of you have exhibited since you impressed. With some, it's been subtle. With others, however, the changes have been quite profound.

"Impressing a dragon is not unlike the very rare soul bonding that can happen between couples. In every recorded soul bonding they spoke of personality changes which occurred to make the person more attuned to their bond partner. Each of you is bonded to a dragon, like Harry. But Harry can hear and speak with every dragon on the planet. His bond is probably the most intense of all and he's responding to what the dragons want. They want a champion to lead them, and the bond he has with them will help to mold him into the man they need him to be."

"In certain areas, especially those relating to dragons, Harry will exhibit a very forceful personality. In other areas, he'll be his normal self," Albus concluded.

Several nodded at Albus' words.

"It makes sense," Hermione mused. "Harry was always intense about certain things in the past. Now he's so much more."

"Mister Dark and Dreamy," murmured Mariah with a lilt. Her comment set all the girls tittering, but a number of them would admit later that Harry's attitude had been really attractive to them.

Lac Logipi Crater, Kenya, March 5th...

The extinct volcano was unnamed. Except for its location near Lac Logipi, it would be impossible to locate at all. It was also home to one of the smallest dragon reserves in the world.

With less than one hundred dragons in the reserve, they were able to easily overwhelm and chase out the small number of dragon handlers when they reawakened to their heritage a few months earlier. Since then, like so many other Weyrs, they had to contend with wizards probing around, trying to find ways to reestablish control over what they felt was their rightful property.

Thanks to the way the reserve was run, males were routinely culled from the herd and only a few were left to provide stud service to the females. This meant that the senior male dragon was a very young dragon who lacked experience. In other Weyrs, the senior female would have assumed a dominant role in controlling the other dragons, but like so many other Weyrs, once they had rediscovered the ability to speak with each other, things became extremely confusing.

The Weyr banded together to chase the wizards out, but there was no clear agreement on who ruled at Lac Logipi. It was a failure they would come to regret.

A group of smarter than usual wizards hit upon a solution that they felt would give them the best chance to slaughter some of the beasts and harvest their bodies. The black market price on dragon products made this illicit and illegal method of attacking the reserve very attractive.

Kekreth was barely ten years old and was the senior male dragon in the Weyr. He knew he should have deferred to Simath, the senior female, but she was old and weak. Simath had very unwisely decided to allow Kekreth to lead.

Dawn was just breaking and sunlight wasn't even filling the crater when the sound woke the Weyr. Eight wizards controlling the crews of three T-72 main battle tanks borrowed from the Kenyan Military crested the ridge of the crater.

Shocked and surprised by something so alien, Simath bellowed in fear, catching the attention of the lead tank. The turret traversed a short distance and a high explosive anti-tank round tore through the old female. She died instantly.

Kekreth, enraged, charged and a second tank cannon fired. The dragon slid to a halt on the bowl floor, his rear legs blown completely off. He bellowed in pain and rapidly bled to death, shock prevented him from going Between.

The tanks started firing as rapidly as they could, before the dragons could organize any kind of defense. Finally, one dragon gave a clear order and the Weyr leapt into the air and went between, leaving eight dead dragons and four hatchlings too young to fly unassisted.

The tanks fell silent and the wizards whooped in joy. They had bagged more dragons than they thought they would!

The Hatching Weyr, Disko Island Greenland, March 5th...

Harry sat leaning up against Chekiath, relaxing for the first time in what seemed like days. Nearby, Hagrid ran the riders through their exercises. Remus was once again busy talking to Spath, who was enjoying the warm waters of the hot spring.

Harry shuddered slightly. He liked a hot bath, but those hot springs were dangerous to people. The water would scald any human, but the dragons weren't bothered by the heat at all. Only the pools at the very fringe of the caldera were cool enough for humans to bathe in and they were too far from the tents for anyone to want to run, barely clothed, to enjoy them.

"Harry? Might I have a word?"

He looked up and squinted. Albus stood nearby, looking anxious.

"Of course, Albus," he replied, then he waved his wand and conjured a low seat for the old man.

Dumbledore looked at the seat and seemed pleased with the magic. "I spoke earlier with Dobby and he told me you were capable of summoning things without a wand?"

Harry nodded. "Yes, I can do a few things wandlessly, but I haven't worked on it like I should. Although, I can do one thing which I've been able to drive Sirius crazy over."

"Oh?"

Harry smiled. "I discovered this by accident. Take out your wand and hold it in front of you."

Albus pulled out his wand and looked at Harry expectantly. He wasn't disappointed as the tip of his wand lit up as though he'd cast a lumos with it.

Harry grinned at his astonishment. "Now Sirius thinks he's suddenly having accidental magic issues and Remus has been teasing him about wand discharges," he said. "It's not very useful, but it was amusing to prank Sirius."

Dumbledore shook his head, imagining the scene in his mind. Knowing Sirius, he would take the issue of accidental magic and worry over it for days. He couldn't suppress a smile thinking about it. "I am pleased to see you've been practicing this, Harry. Wandless magic is not an easy skill and frankly I have never seen anyone use a focus they weren't holding. If possible, I would like for us to spend some time exploring this. As funny as it might be, I'm wondering what else it may be useful for."

Harry nodded, then shuddered as a chill ran down his spine. Around the bowl every dragon stopped whatever they were doing and turned to the southwest. A mournful keen arose that shook Harry to his very core.

"Harry! What is it?" asked Dumbledore in alarm.

Suddenly both men stood and staggered as ninety dragons appeared overhead bellowing in fear and grief.

"WEYRLEADER!" shouted a voice in his head.

Harry grabbed his head as a series of images flooded his mind. He staggered a few steps clutching at his head, then he straightened up. "Dragons! To wing!" he shouted.

Chekiath was instantly by his side and Harry was climbing onto his back. The bowl filled quickly as Campbeltown emptied of its entire complement of dragons, including a very surprised Sirius Black on Norendrath.

Dumbledore stared at Harry in alarm. The old Headmaster could feel the anger from the boy, and the magic that was surging through him. He noted that Harry's dragon was shimmering in response to his rider's magic.

Chekiath sprang aloft and then the dragons were gone. The strange dragons found places to land and mourn their loss. The bowl filled with the sound of their keening.

Dumbledore shook himself from his shock and looked around. The Weyrlings were nearby with their riders looking confused and distraught by what little information they could get from their dragons. The hatchlings and their riders were nearly incoherent with grief. The only thing the new riders could get for certain from their dragons was the keen sense of loss and grief and it was affecting them deeply. Something terrible was happening to dragons and they knew it.

Lac Logipi Crater, Kenya, March 5th...

Over five hundred dragons appeared over the bowl of the crater. They were high enough that they were not within range of the muggle machines and hadn't been spotted.

"Norendrath, stay up here with your wing. Protect Smelly Dog," Harry commanded. He looked down and spotted the tanks, their shape was unmistakeable.

"Yes, Weyrleader."

"Spath, Momnarth, Narth, when I command it, dive on the wizards in the center of the bowl. Harass them. All other wings will follow me to destroy those machines. Use your strongest fire on them." He waited a moment, looking over the field of engagement. "Now!" he told the dragons.

Chekiath folded his wings and they dropped into a steep dive. As one, all of the wings, save one, copied his motion, hurtling downward on an unsuspecting enemy.

Harry was incensed. They had killed his dragons and they would pay! Behind him, more than four hundred dragons fell into a steep, soundless dive, aiming for the tanks below. The remaining dragons, except for Norendrath's wing, dove on the Wizards in the center of the bowl.

The silent approach on the tanks wasn't noticed until the last minute and only one tank managed to open fire using one of its machine guns. Chekiath belched fire and immediately corrected his aim. His fire vaporized the bullets before they could come anywhere near him or his rider.

Chekiath's fire bathed the tank and the man standing in the open hatch aiming the turret machine gun. On contact, the tank turned white hot. The man never had a chance to scream. Chekiath pulled away as more dragon fire came to bear on the rapidly disintegrating tank.

The T-72 tank was one of the most robust and powerful tanks ever built by the former Soviet Union. It was not designed to withstand temperatures that could vaporize steel. Nearly one hundred dragons hit the center tank with fire hotter than the hottest blast furnace. The tank vanished in a terrific explosion as the ammunition cooked off.

The fireball and heat was enough to cripple the other two tanks. The crews inside never had a chance, as the heat turned those tanks into ovens. A moment later, both tanks also exploded as the other dragons flamed them.

The dragons still diving on the tanks changed direction to land on the lip of the bowl.

With the tanks gone, Harry turned his attention to the wizards cowering in the center of the bowl. They had been busy getting ready to harvest the dead dragons when Harry arrived.

The wizards were seriously unnerved by the presence of so many dragons. They were surrounded by beasts on the ground and the air was filled with them, bellowing in anger. In their fear, the wizards completely forgot they could apparate.

Harry and the dragons following him banked sharply and flew past the burning tanks to land near the center of the bowl. He slid down from Chekiath and looked around with a thunderous expression. Six other Horntail dragons landed to each side of him, providing extra cover. He held up a hand and the dragons fell silent.

He took in the scene, saying nothing. The only sounds in the bowl were coming from the frightened wizards, the burning tanks and the corralled hatchlings.

Kekreth lay still next to the wizards. It was obvious that the poor dragon had died in agony. While a modern dragon would normally go Between to die, too much pain, or too great an injury could interfere with that. Kekreth and the others had been taken by surprise and were either killed instantly or were too badly injured to follow their instincts. All of the dragons had suffered terrible injuries.

The wizards had been unloading a bottomless bag full of containers onto several conjured tables. Their intent was also clear. They were getting ready to harvest potion ingredients from Kekreth's body and the others.

Harry took it all in, Kekreth, Simath, six other dead adults and four hatchlings that were penned up waiting their turn and crying out in fear. It was obvious it was a hastily conjured enclosure that penned them in but it was strong enough to prevent their escape. The poor hatchlings were whining in terror. All seemed injured, but one was badly injured and barely moving.

"You're safe now, little ones. We are here to protect you."

The four hatchlings slowly fell silent, and turned to look at Harry. "Weyrleader?" asked one hopefully.

Harry nodded. "Yes, you're safe now," he repeated. "When we leave this place, we will take you with us."

Harry looked again at the dead adults and with tears streaming down his cheeks, he turned to Spath. "We arrived too late," he said brokenly. "Burn the bodies of our brothers. Leave no trace behind for a wizard to profit from."

"It will be done, Weyrleader," replied Spath softly. This was a terrible day, but the eldest dragon couldn't help but feel pride for the actions of their Weyrleader. He protected them, and then wept for their loss. Chekiath had chosen very well indeed!

Finally, Harry turned to face the wizards. He wiped away his tears and stood straight. "I don't care if any of you speak English or not. You are guilty of crimes against the dragon nation and for that I sentence you to the cold of Between," he said, his voice void of emotion. He gestured to the dragons that were still overhead.

Eight airborne dragons swooped down and plucked each terrified wizard from the ground and then vanished. Harry knew they were heading back to Campbeltown, but while Between they would release their grip on those wizards.

Harry's heart lurched in his chest and he bit back a sob. On his order, eight wizards had been killed and however many muggles it took to run those tanks. No matter how much he flinched away, the truth was, he'd just committed murder.

Chekiath turned his attention back to his rider and he crooned softly in distress. Harry gave him a weak smile. "I'm fine, mate," he murmured. "Let's get these hatchlings back to Hagrid and May."

Several large dragons stepped up, tore the pen walls down, then they gently lifted the badly injured hatchling and his brothers out of the pen. One by one, the adults sprang aloft, taking their burden to Disko. The badly injured hatchling was the last to be moved and it moaned piteously when it was picked up. Without thinking, Harry reached out with his magic and cast a charm that put the dragon to sleep.

It wouldn't be until later that people would realize that magical riders could cast beneficial spells on their dragons. For reasons unknown, these spells bypassed the dragon's inherent resistance.

"We'll burn the bodies then go home, Weyrleader," Spath said softly.

He nodded and then moved to Chekiath to mount. Once he was in place, the dragon sprang aloft. "Bring the Wings to the Hatching Weyr, Spath," he commanded silently. "Tonight we mourn and we do it as a family."

Chekiath jumped Between and Spath turned back to the bodies remaining in the bowl. The dragons let loose a massive roar and then ignited the bodies of their kin. When they were done, the ground would be melted glass and nothing would remain of the eight adult dragons.

The Hatching Weyr, Disko Island Greenland, March 5th...

The riders clustered together. Some of them were clearly upset and distraught by the feelings they were getting from their dragons. Albus Dumbledore and the other non-riders stood off to one side, bewildered by the events unfolding.

Even Hagrid huddled with Selanth, weeping softly.

Remus walked over to Hermione and May. Both girls had their arms wrapped around their dragons, who continued their low, mournful keen.

"Hermione, what's happening? Can't you tell us?" he pleaded.

She looked at him with wild eyes brimming over with tears. "Dragons have been killed," she whispered. "A whole Weyr has retreated, leaving behind their young and their dead."

Before Remus could react to her statement, a dragon appeared overhead and bellowed in distress, then three more dragons appeared, one after another. The riders all broke from their stasis as if someone had hit them with electricity.

It was clear that the dragons overhead carried injured hatchlings.

"Here, here!" shouted Hagrid, waving to the airborne dragons. May ran for Hagrid's potions bag, while others ran for blankets and bandages. It was chaos, but now it was an orderly sort of chaos. Without even being told what to do, the riders knew instinctively that injured dragons were arriving.

Harry arrived next on Chekiath. He directed his dragon to land near the main meeting tent and he watched as his riders treated the injured hatchlings.

"What have I done, Cheki?" he whispered. "I killed people today."

"You protected the Weyrs, Harry. You did what my Weyrleader was supposed to do; you protected us and you administered justice." replied his dragon. Chekiath's eyes were spinning rapidly and flashing with bright flashes of yellow.

The Weyr filled as dragons arrived from Lac Logipi. Many of them landing along the rim of the bowl or settling in the mouth of the cave entrances.

Harry sat heavily on the ground and ignored the chill. The tents were too far away from the hot springs to take advantage of the ground heat. Chekiath crooned and curled around his rider, then placed his large head in Harry's lap. Harry bowed his head and wept silently, caressing his dragon and drawing what comfort he could from the close contact.

The riders bustled around, helping ease the dragons where they could, while Hagrid worked frantically to save the dragon Harry had put to sleep. After ten long minutes, the hatchling awoke and struggled to his feet. With a piteous whine, he leaped skyward and vanished.

A low keening howled through the Weyr as the dragons mourned the passing of another one of their own. The riders stumbled back towards their own dragons in shock and grief, instinctively reaching out for their own dragon for comfort.

"This is not good," murmured Albus to Remus. All of the non-riders seemed too stunned by the events to fully understand what was happening, but even they couldn't help themselves as they, too, were moved by the painful passing of the hatchling.

Remus nodded tearfully, and turned to Sirius. "You were there. What happened, Siri?"

"Harry ordered Norendrath to stay aloft. We were high up so I couldn't easily see what was happening. But there were three muggle machines and a bunch of dead dragons. Harry and the others dove on the machines, flaming them, and they exploded. Then he turned to some wizards who were preparing to harvest ingredients from the dragons. The wizards were plucked from the ground by dragons, who then went Between. Then we came back here. Where are the wizards? Did Harry send them to Campbeltown?" Sirius asked.

"I don't know," replied Remus uneasily.

Sirius turned to Norendrath. "Norendrath, old bud, what happened to the wizards that were captured at the Weyr?"

"The Weyrleader ordered them taken Between, Smelly Dog."

"Taken Between?" repeated Sirius in confusion. "Taken Between to where?"

"No where. The dragons released them while Between," Norendrath said. "It is a terrible thing and the Weyrleader is hurting deeply because of it. He did what he must to protect us, even when he knew it would hurt him. Chekiath is very unhappy right now. The Weyrleader handed out justice today, as is his right and his duty. He mourns for the dead and for what he had to do."

Sirius blanched and Remus sucked in a deep breath. "Dragons have killed wizards on Harry's order."

Albus closed his eyes in pain and lowered his head. "It was inevitable, I'm afraid," he murmured. "Dear Merlin, Harry must feel terrible. He so wanted to avoid killing anyone."

All eyes turned to find Harry sitting not far away, his head bowed with Chekiath surrounding him. Chekiath crooned softly, but his eyes were spinning rapidly and flashing with distress.

Sirius started to move, but Dumbledore reached out and grabbed him by his wrist. "Wait," he said softly. "They need to work their way through this, then you'll be able to help him."

Sirius looked at the old man, then back at Harry and he nodded reluctantly. "Moony, let's get Dobby to serve up some drinks to the riders. I think its going to be a long night."

The non-riders found themselves struck by the silence that followed the dragons mourning for the young hatchling. Each rider stayed close to their dragon, each drawing comfort from the bond.

After an hour, the riders disentangled themselves from their dragons and walked over to sit near Harry. Each was followed by their own dragon, who sat behind their riders. Behind them stood the non-riders, who were wondering what was happening. This was a totally new situation to everyone and the non-riders were unable to help in any way.

When they were all assembled, Hermione and May both stepped forward and touched Harry on the shoulders. He looked up at them both, then he noted his riders arrayed out in front of them.

He wiped away his tears using his sleeve, then he held up his hands to them. "You can't see it, but there is blood on these hands. Today I murdered to protect our dragons. I ordered the death of those that would have, and did, kill our kind."

"No," May said firmly. "The blood you see is the blood of our dead, put there by wizards. It's our blood Harry, not theirs. You did what you were supposed to do. You are our Weyrleader and you proved that today. Today you showed that us what it really means to be dragon riders."

Harry looked over at her and wiped at the tears in his eyes. "But," he said, trying to explain.

"No, Harry," Luna said firmly. "I never thought about it before, but I know now that I don't have it in me to be a Weyrleader. But that's not why I was chosen as a potential. You, Harry, were the first, and some spark of what you are now must have been known by Chekiath at your first meeting. That's why he chose you. After the bond, you became what they needed you to be, what we all need

you to be. You are our Weyrleader and it makes me feel safer knowing that. You did what I, and the rest of us, would not have had the strength to do, even though it was right and had to be done."

Harry looked down and blushed slightly. "You are the Weyrleader, Harry. We believe in you. We always knew you could be Weyrleader, even if you had doubts," Chekiath said.

Harry nodded and looked up at the dragons from Lac Logipi lining the rim of the bowl. "Who among you is the remaining senior dragon from that Weyr?"

"I am, Weyrleader. I, Sorth, am now the senior female from Lac Logipi Weyr. I thank you for saving our hatchlings," replied a dragon.

Harry oriented on the Swedish Short Snout who was staring directly at him. "How did this happen? Why did the Senior dragon not order the Weyr to wing?"

"Simath was old and she was not interested in leading. She was tired and growing weaker with each passing turn. Everyone knew her time was nearing. She deferred to the senior male. But Kekreth was too young; barely ten turns old. Kekreth was not a good leader, he was too young and too impetuous.

"When the human machines arrived, Kekreth did not recognize the danger from the machines that barked smoke and fire. Simath bellowed in fear and the machines killed her. Kekreth unwisely charged the machines and also died.

"The machines barked fire again and more died. We tried to flame the machines, but they had things that stung like many arrows. We tried to protect our hatchlings but they were killing us. When I saw we couldn't protect the hatchlings, I ordered the Weyr aloft and came to you for help. We did not want to leave them behind. It will be something that will haunt me until Between claims me."

Harry closed his eyes at the pain in the dragon's voice. He sighed heavily and he looked at her. "Sorth, you cannot blame yourself for what happened. You were caught by surprise and tried to protect weyrlings too young for flight. We grieve with you. Your loss is ours. There is no blame on you, Sorth. You did what had to be done to save those you could. Should you return to your Weyr, I appoint you

to lead your clan. You are welcome to stay here at the Hatching Weyr or you may return home. If you return home I want you to guard your Weyr carefully. If the human machines come again, you are to flee to here."

Sorth bobbed her head in acknowledgment. "Thank you, Weyrleader. With your permission, we will stay here until our young ones heal, then we'll return to Lac Logipi."

Harry nodded, then his eyes glazed over. "Dragons, hear me," he called. Every dragon in the Weyr fell silent at Harry's call. The riders looked startled at the idea that Harry could talk to every dragon on the planet at one time. They knew about the ability, but had never seen it in action before. They could clearly hear him in their minds. His voice seemed to ride on a wave of power and they could easily believe it would carry around the globe to every dragon on the planet.

"Hear me, dragons. Every Weyr is to have a leader. If you cannot decide who is to lead, then speak to me and I will help you pick from among your clan. Bespeak to Sorth and learn about the machine that can kill. If you see such a machine coming to your Weyr, take your young and your eggs and flee to the Hatching Weyr. Today, we mourn for lives lost. Learn from Sorth and her clan so that this never happens again!"

Harry shook as he broke the connection and he heard an echo of many hundreds of dragon voices acknowledging his orders. He had spoken to many dragons that were distant, but this was the first time he spoke to every dragon on the planet. He would later learn, much to his surprise, that even the riders had heard him.

He smiled wanly at his riders, who stared at him with a touch of awe, then he turned to Remus. "Tomorrow we must speak about when it is acceptable for a dragon to kill. I did not recognize the exact type of machine, but I know what it was. The wizards had taken control of some muggle tanks. For now I have ordered every Weyr to flee if they see such machines. But we need to be able to tell the dragons when it is acceptable to kill."

"You do know that the Pern Standard dragons were incapable of killing?" asked Remus.

Harry arched an eyebrow at his friend. "Remus, as you are so fond of pointing out, our dragons are thousands of generations beyond that original design and have evolved abilities that the designers never envisioned. Today I just confirmed what we already knew. Our dragons can kill if they need to. Now they find it merely distasteful."

Remus nodded unhappily, but he could see Harry's point.

Harry stared at Remus for a moment longer, then he turned to Hagrid. "How are the other hatchlings?"

Hagrid shrugged unhappily. "The little ones are mostly fine, Harry. A few bruises an' scrapes. One has been shot with somethin' like an arrow. It went clean through the tyke's leg, but it'll heal."

"It was a gunshot wound, Harry," May said. "Fortunately it missed anything important. I'll keep an eye on him to make sure he doesn't develop an infection. I'll help Hagrid check the others to make sure there are no other injuries when we're done here."

He nodded his thanks to May. "Then that's about all we can do for now. I don't know about you riders but I'm wiped. If you want to skip your classes today, that's fine by me."

He stood and placed a hand on Chekiath. "What do you say to a bit of a lie in, mate?"

Harry led his dragon back to his Weyr, feeling like he was a million years old. He wasn't sure what he felt more, the loss of the dragons or the killing of people. In either case, he felt old and tired when he entered his quarters.

He watched Chekiath get settled, then he turned towards his own bed, kicking off his shoes.

"Harry, may I come in?"

He turned and spotted Dumbledore and with a sigh he nodded and waved him in. "Albus, if you're going to give me a lecture about second chances..."

He paused when he saw Albus holding up his hand and shaking his head.

"No, my boy, I'm not going to give you any such lecture."

He sat on the chair by Harry's desk and motioned for Harry to sit on the bed. "When I was a younger man, I took part in a war in which millions of muggles and thousands of wizards died. I personally beat Grindelwald in a duel and then I let the Germans imprison him. In retrospect, I often wonder if I shouldn't have killed him, but at the time, I couldn't. We had a history between us and I thought that keeping him alive was for the best."

He shook his head and looked at Harry bleakly. "I learned many years later that, despite his being locked up, he was still able to spread his vile message via letters to people outside the prison. While his involvement with Voldemort was minimal, he was able to help keep the bigotry alive with his poisonous letters."

"Today you killed and whether you know it or not, it changes you. You have been touched by fate, and because of that you are placed in a position in which such decisions are necessary. I'm an old man and I've made a great many mistakes because I tried to do too much by myself. Don't fall into the same trap, Harry. Find someone you can talk to on a regular basis."

Seeing the look in Harry's eyes, Dumbledore smiled softly. "Yes, I know you have your dragon. And do not mistake me, Chekiath is a wondrous being who loves you beyond measure, but some things are just alien to his existence. Find someone who can be an anchor for your humanity. Find someone who you can share your troubles, even if all that person does is listen."

Harry grimaced. "That's easier said than done," he muttered.

Dumbledore laughed. "Yes, it is, but make the effort, lad. Believe me. I know from experience that while you did the right thing today, it will still gnaw at you."

Harry nodded unhappily. "I'll try."

Dumbledore smiled again and stood. "Thank you. I'll leave you to rest now. Good nite, Harry."

"Good night, Albus," he replied distractedly.

The old man walked from the Weyr and he shook his head.

"See, even White Beard thinks you need to mate," Chekiath said smugly.

Harry groaned and threw himself back on the bed, then pulled the pillow over his head.

The Hatching Weyr, Disko Island Greenland, March 6th...

Remus looked up and smiled when Dan and Emma entered the tent. Dobby appeared and placed two cups of tea down in front of them, then vanished to get their breakfast.

"Everyone get to sleep all right?" Remus asked quietly.

It had been a very uneasy night for the Weyr. The injured hatchling with the gunshot wound had woken people in the middle of the night when the pain potion wore off. The riders had stayed up discussing the events of the day and, other than Harry, all had gone to bed late.

Dan grunted and reached for his tea. "I'd like to say yes, but the boys were up until late talking amongst themselves. Yesterday was a wake up call for them. Until yesterday, they had been thinking this was an adventure that earned them a dragon to ride."

Emma nodded solemnly in agreement. "The girls were up late also. I don't think they were as shocked by yesterday's events as they were worried about Harry."

"Harry?"

Emma smiled. "Harry isn't aware of it, but there's a whole clique of girls that hope he'll show an interest in one of them at some point. At first it was all very competitive, but now I think they are all just worried and hoping one of them can help him by taking his mind off of all the pressing problems."

"Let me guess," Dan said a bit sourly, "Our daughter is among the girls who wouldn't mind Harry being interested in her."

"Sweetheart, your princess was on that list before it even started. She's been sweet on the boy ever since he jumped onto the back of a troll to save her," Emma said. "The girls decided last night to let Hermione have first shot at Harry, if he's interested. Unfortunately for all of those girls, Harry is not a normal hormonal male teen. His upbringing has made him painfully shy around girls when dealing with personal issues, so he avoids them like the plague. Who ever lands the boy is going to have to be aggressive about it because he won't be."

Dan grimaced. "Wonderful."

Emma patted her husband on the shoulder and turned to Remus. "Note the joys of being father of a teenage girl," she said with a smirk.

Remus chuckled and shook his head. "If I thought it would help Harry, I'd be pushing for him to find a girlfriend. Right now, I'm not sure what he needs, except the support of his friends."

Dan nodded to Dobby, who placed a plate of eggs and sausage in front of him. "Christ, what have we done to these kids? Harry's not even fifteen yet and he's making life and death decisions."

"Including one involving his own death," Emma said quietly, reminding them of Harry's attempt during the first task. "He didn't want to kill anyone, but he couldn't let the wizards kill dragons. You all saw what happened when that baby died. It devastated them all! Dragons connect them together in ways we can't understand. What Harry was forced to do yesterday wasn't the act of a child."

"Like it or not, there are five or so girls that are trying to win his attention, and honestly, I don't think it would be right to stand in their way. None of them are children anymore."

Sirius sat next to Remus and smiled his thanks to Dobby for the cup of coffee. "No, they aren't children, but they aren't adults yet, either. Harry will be fine. Chekiath will see to that. I had a long talk with Norendrath last night and the dragons are ecstatic over Harry's actions. They don't like having to kill, but Harry proved himself yesterday, and each of our riders will ultimately face similar challenges," he said softly. "I'll do anything for Harry, and I'm sure right now the best thing to do is just be there to help."

Albus entered and Emma waved him over. He normally stayed at Campbeltown, but had come over to Disko Island yesterday to speak with Harry about the magical training he had planned.

"Good morning," he said.

Several greeted the old man and he went to sit next to the Grangers. "Have any of the riders gotten up yet?"

"I don't think so," Emma murmured. "I spoke briefly with Hermione last night before she turned in. I think yesterday brought the realization that being a dragon rider doesn't just mean riding a dragon."

Dan turned to Albus. "I don't understand. Why did those wizards resort to muggle methods?"

"It's a question I'm interested in hearing an answer too, also," Harry said from the doorway. He walked over to the table and sat down. Behind him the other riders started filing in.

Albus nodded and held up a hand.

Harry frowned, then he realized that Albus was waiting for everyone to get settled.

Once everyone sat down and was served their morning drink, Albus stood and walked to the front of the room.

"Dragons are magical," he said quietly and a number of people looked at him strangely. "No, let me rephrase that. Dragons are infused with magic. The wizards routinely kill dragons and use the heartstrings in wands, never realizing that dragon scales have the same magical properties. I now know of the true origin of dragons and can't help but wonder if they didn't have some magic of their own before man started changing them. Or perhaps magic is something unique to our planet, and by coming here, magic became a part of them, as it is a part of every other living thing."

"As you all know, dragons are resistant to magic. It's the sole reason why there were so many dragon handlers; it took many wizards, all working together, to overcome that resistance. An adult dragon,

even a small one like a Vipertooth, requires nearly a dozen wizards to force it to submit using the pain spell. According to Sirius, yesterday there weren't enough wizards to subdue a dragon, let alone kill one.

"I believe the magical nature of the dragons allows them to diffuse magic cast at them. I admit to being rather modest, but I'm also rated to be among the strongest wizards alive, and yet I know I could not use a spell to kill a dragon. If I had to use magic to do so, I would probably rely on banishing objects at the dragon," Albus said softly.

"That explains the tanks," Dan said. "They are all about kinetic energy weapons."

"Scales can be used for a wand focus," Harry murmured, then he remembered casting that sleep spell on the baby dragon. He stood abruptly with a look of astonishment on his face.

"Harry?" asked Dumbledore, somewhat alarmed by the wild look in his eyes.

"Draco, Millicent, call your dragons and ask them to meet Chekiath outside, please," he said, then he walked from the room.

Everyone exchanged a perplexed look, then the riders all rose and followed Harry outside. A moment later, the adults scrambled to follow, not wanting to miss whatever was happening.

Harry stood in front of the administration and meeting tent and he calmly caressed Chekiath's eye ridges.

Sinnath loped into view from around a corner. He was dripping wet, having apparently been soaking in one of the hot pools while Draco had breakfast. Tarianth, Millicent's dragon, came from the other direction.

The dragons were still too young to be comfortable flying and would not be allowed to fly with their riders for another week. As such, they were largely still earthbound when they moved.

Both Draco and Millicent stepped out to meet their dragons, who seemed very happy to be called.

"Draco, Milli, place your wand hand on your dragon, just forward of the spot where you'd sit. Make sure you have a good connection."

Both did as he asked, then turned to look at him curiously. He grinned at them both. "Now pretend your hand still holds a wand and cast a lumos."

Millicent nodded and closed her eyes. "Lumos," she intoned, while Draco stared at Harry as though he'd lost his mind.

"Draco," hissed Karen Khan. "Do it!"

He shook his head and cast the spell, then turned to see almost all of the magical students smirking at him. Him! He blinked and glanced over his shoulder to Sinnath, who rumbled softly. "I like this," he said. Sinnath was glowing softly in the bright sunlight and Draco was sure he'd be downright brilliant at night.

"Oh, well done, Harry!" exclaimed Albus. "We never think about wand focuses until they are in the wand! But why can't the focus still be useable when the creature is alive?"

"Oh, this is toasty," declared a voice. Everyone turned to see Luna's Trandieth glowing a soft red.

"Luna, what did you cast?" asked Hermione.

Luna shrugged. "It seemed that Harry was leaning towards area effect spells or spells that directly affected a focus, so I cast a warming charm as if I wanted the spell to warm my wand."

"I don't know if it will have much value, but when you spoke of the scales, I had to ask. Why couldn't the entire dragon be a focus for our magic? Yesterday I put that injured baby to sleep so that he could be brought here," Harry said with regret, then he turned to Draco and Millicent. She was still staring in wonder at her softly glowing dragon. "Thank you both, but now we can go back inside to continue our discussion."

Harry turned to Remus, but the man was grinning and holding up a hand to forestall him.

"Yes, I know. It's another thing to write down and to look into," Remus said before Harry could ask.

"Since you are discussing your sticks, may I say something, Weyrleader?" asked Comaloth.

Hermione jerked and looked in the direction of her Weyr. She was surprised that her dragon would speak out.

"Of course, Comaloth. What do you wish to say?" Harry replied, a bit surprised himself.

"My rider carries a stick that is very distasteful. I didn't mention it sooner because we've been too busy and she doesn't use it much, but could you tell her to get rid of it? I dislike her carrying around a piece of the dead."

Hermione's expression grew stricken. "My God," she whispered, "I forgot entirely about it! My wand has a heartstring core!"

"Does anyone else have a heartstring core wand?" asked Harry.

"I do," said Lee Jordan.

"Here, too," added Mark Harper.

"I can fashion wands from a scale," Albus offered. "I'm no Ollivander, but they will work and won't be as offensive to their dragons. Let them use their wands for the few days it will take me to make new ones."

Harry glanced over at Hermione, who was looking at her wand in disgust. Lee and Mark echoed her expression.

"Dragons," he called to the local dragons, "I understand how distasteful these wands are and I share your feelings toward them. But at least for a few more days, allow their use. Once replacements have been crafted, I'll let the riders dispose of them."

"It will be as you command, Weyrleader," Spath said in reply.

Harry nodded and led the others back into the meeting tent so they could continue their breakfast and their discussion over yesterday's

events. As he entered, he made a mental note to survey any future potential riders who were magical and remove their wands before they impressed.

#10 Downing Street, London, March 6th...

Prime Minister Major looked up and grinned. "I don't know how you gentlemen knew to come today, but I am glad to see you."

Lord Mills exchanged a look with Sir Robert, who nodded back to him. "Actually, sir, we came to brief you on an action taken by the dragons yesterday which resulted in a number of deaths, both dragon and human."

Major grimaced and looked sharply at the two men. "On our soil?"

"No, sir. Near as we can determine, it happened in Kenya," replied James.

"Well, that's something, at least," muttered Major, then he turned to a blank wall. "Would you reveal yourselves to my guests, please?"

A shimmering appeared and two men looked rather unhappy with the Prime Minister for revealing their presence. "Gentlemen," Major said to the two wizards, "I realize that secrecy is your primary weapon, but I want you and everyone in your department to be briefed on what these two are doing. And you are further ordered to find Lord Mills or Sir Robert should you ever believe I might have been compromised. Understand?"

Both men nodded, acknowledging the order.

He turned back to his two guests, "Gentlemen, Major Parks and Captain Wilson are attached to our Diplomatic Protection group. Most of their class have been sent on to the palace, but they've assigned a few wizards to cover me, as well."

James and Sir Robert nodded in greeting to the two bodyguards and at a curt nod from the Prime Minister, they donned their invisibility cloaks again.

"The American Ambassador is due here in thirty minutes. While we wait, why don't you explain the action taken yesterday," Major said, then he moved back to his seat at his desk.

Sir Robert explained what happened and he detailed the fact that the Wizards were controlling three tanks of the Kenyan military.

Major frowned heavily. He wasn't by any means a pacifist, but he wasn't one to go looking for a fight if he could avoid it. He was a firm believer in the motto "War is the last resort of diplomacy". What bothered him was the fact that a mere handful of wizards had grabbed control of three very dangerous machines and used them to kill. He shuddered to think what it would be like if something similar happened in London.

Major's intercom buzzed and he held up a hand, silencing Sir Robert. "Yes?"

"Sir, Ambassador Madison is here."

"Please send him in."

"Very good, sir."

Sir Robert and Lord Mills stood and walked over to one side, away from the two hidden security officers. The door opened and Madison entered, followed by another, younger looking gentleman carrying a briefcase.

Major frowned. "Ambassador, I summoned you here for a private meeting," he said frostily. "Did my secretary not tell you what we would be discussing had our highest security requirements?"

Madison looked surprised by the tone of the Prime Minister. "Sir, this is Addison Wiznicki, my new aide. I can assure you he has full clearance by my government."

Major sat back in his chair. "Very well. You remember Sir Robert and Lord Mills? They were present at our last meeting."

Madison looked at the two men still standing and his brow furrowed. "I am quite afraid I..." He trailed off and shook his head. "I'm sorry, but I don't recall meeting these two men, Mister Prime Minister."

Major nodded to himself. He had been briefed on this sort of spell work. The man's memory had been erased, but wasn't actively being controlled

"And so you don't remember us warning you that your government may have been compromised at the highest levels?"

Wiznicki reached into his sleeve. He barely managed to draw his wand out before he froze, feeling the tip of another wand pressed against the back of his neck.

"Mister Wiznicki, I would strongly suggest you release your wand and let it fall to the ground. My people have orders to kill any wizard who refuses to cooperate. And don't even think about reaching for your portkey. This office is warded. Attempting to leave by magical means will have a most unpleasant effect on you," Major Parks said.

Wiznicki blanched seeing Wilson drop an invisibility cloak, then reached into a pocket and pull out a pair of handcuffs.

"Mister Ambassador, I'm sorry this had to happen, but it's necessary. If you would take a few moments to review the security tape of our last meeting, you'll understand," John Major said.

Major turned to James Mills, "James, if you would escort the Ambassador to the next room, you'll find a TV already set up with the tape ready to play."

James nodded. "Sir, if you would follow me?"

Madison followed James into the other room while the two security men dealt with the American Wizard.

Major turned a harsh look at the handcuffed man who looked stunned by the turn of events. "Mister Wiznicki, Her Majesty's government has wizards working for them. Unlike our Ministry, or your Department of Magic, we have wizards on our side. We have a very singular honor in store for you. You may consider yourself the very first prisoner in the war against the Wizarding World."

Major looked at Major Parks, "Get him out of my sight before I give into the temptation and slug the bastard," he growled.

Parks grinned and jerked a thumb at Wilson, who dragged Wiznicki from the room and into the hands of a waiting security detail.

Ministry of Magic, Department of Mysteries, March 6th...

Alejandro Croaker looked at the map for a moment, and for the first time since the death of his friend Amelia, he grinned.

"This is confirmed?"

"Yes, sir," said a man whose face was obscured by a charm.

"Well, damn," he muttered. "It looks like someone finally woke up to what was happening. I wouldn't be surprised to discover Potter and Dumbledore at the heart of this."

He glanced down again. It was a map of London and it was dotted with newly created anti-apparation and portkey wards. A few days ago, the map, which normally showed magic in magical zones, suddenly started showing magic popping up at Government offices and buildings. Now nearly forty buildings were protected under wards.

"What else have you got for me?" he asked.

The other man handed over a parchment listing a group of known Wizards who had rejected their society and returned to the muggle one. "This is a list of people we've lost track of," said the man. "Mind you, it's no where near complete. We only started putting together that list last year when you suggested we might need outside help to bring the Ministry back to its proper direction."

Croaker nodded unhappily. One of the reasons why his department was untouchable was because they were the final arbiters of high justice in the wizarding world, and part of their charter was that they were charged with the task of making sure the government didn't endanger the wizarding world too much.

It hadn't always worked out properly. The Goblin Wars were proof of that. But for every attempt to wage war against the goblins, there were two more attempts that were thwarted by selective assassinations within the Ministry and society in general.

The problem was that, while the Minister himself couldn't find out what they were doing down here, he could and did control their purse strings. The budget shortage was the primary reason their department had less than a dozen people these days. And eight of them were researchers.

Croaker wanted to put together a list of people they could enlist to aid them if they needed to topple the Ministry, and it looked like they needed to topple it. Unfortunately, someone had pinched the very people Croaker was planning on using.

He stared at the list for a moment longer, then sighed. "There's no way around it. I'm going to have to try to contact Albus and see if he can help."

The other man nodded. He had personally tormented Umbridge for her one attempt to force her way into the department and he really didn't want to go up against three other wizards, plus Umbridge, again without backup.

Fortunately, Umbridge wouldn't remember the three men she lost that day. All she remembered was an intense and irrational fear whenever the department was mentioned in her presence. Both men knew that soon the entire weight of the WDF would be thrown against them. They had only bought themselves some time and not a lot of it at that.

"So, you're going to Dumbledore for help?" he asked incredulously.

Croaker leaned back in his chair. "You're looking at this from the wrong angle. Assume for a moment that the rumors out of Hogwarts are true and that Harry Potter fled the scene with an entire reserve worth of dragons. Then we start hearing how all of the reserves, with the exception of Tibet, have rebelled against their handlers.

"You heard what happened to the muggle Prime Minister, didn't you?"

"They obliviated him," replied the man with a nod.

Croaker nodded. "That's right, they did, because he brought up the subject of dragons. Our good Minister is too blind to connect point A

to point B. Potter has either gone to the muggles looking for help, or contacted them and now they want to know because it would be a violation of their laws."

The man's face was obscured, but even still, it was impossible to not notice the raised eyebrows.

"The muggles have laws protecting dragons?"

Croaker chuckled. "No, of course not. But their laws do not specify human only, like ours do. Therefore, by their laws, if dragons are truly self aware and intelligent, then they are covered by their laws."

"All right, I'll buy it. But what about Dumbledore?"

Croaker sighed. "Dumbledore had been attacked once while in Diagon Alley. I was a fool for not seeing it for what it was. I could have protected Amelia, but I never thought Umbridge would dare to be so bold. Dumbledore fled, but before he did, he deliberately sabotaged the Headmaster selection process at the school. If I had to guess, I'd say he followed his missing students and they are all probably with Potter. Find Potter and you'll find the answers to a lot of questions."

He waved a hand at the map, which was dotted with red circles that hadn't been there this time last year. "Find Potter and I'm sure you'll find muggles helping him. I'm sure Potter is ultimately responsible for that."

The man nodded. "It makes sense, I guess. I'm not sure I buy it entirely, but it beats every other theory I've heard. I'll start looking for Potter tomorrow."

Croaker nodded. "Go quietly. I don't want Umbridge to get wind of this. I suspect that Potter, or someone close to him, controls the assets we need."

"I'll be discreet. Don't worry."

Croaker waved to the man who stood and walked from his office. Once he was gone, he pulled out a blank piece of parchment and started to write a note. He just hoped he could convince Minerva to include it in her mail. He never could get the drop on her. He hadn't

been able to do so while they'd been married. Forty years on and nothing had changed.

She had once been one of his best operatives.

#10 Downing Street, London, March 6th...

Prime Minister Major looked up as a pale faced Madison entered the room and sat down heavily on a chair. Sir Robert poured the man a cup of coffee and added a dash of whiskey to it. James Mills entered a moment later and nodded to Major. He had taken the time to explain the situation to Madison, then he let the man watch the video of his last visit to the Prime Minister's office.

"Major Parks, can you remove the block on the Ambassador's memory?" the Prime Minister asked.

His invisibility cloak rustled and a head appeared. "I can, sir. If he asks, I will. I'd rather not cast anything on him without his permission, at this point. The situation is precarious enough without me making it worse," Parks replied politely.

Major nodded. "An excellent point. Thank you," he murmured, then he turned to the Ambassador. "Ambassador?"

"Do it," he replied heavily. "Get rid of it."

Parks nodded and his wand became visible from under the cloak. "Finite Incantatum," he murmured.

Madison closed his eyes as a wave of vertigo washed over him. Everyone waited patiently for the Ambassador to recover.

Finally, he opened his eyes and wiped his face tiredly. "Dear God, what do we do now?"

"Do you remember what happened?" asked Major.

"I spoke with the President. He was outraged. Then two men appeared and next thing I know I'm leaving the office thinking it was a wonderful meeting," Madison said.

"So you don't believe your president is controlled? You think they're just wiping memories like they did with you?" pressed Major.

Madison shrugged. He couldn't say one way or the other.

"Sir?"

Major blinked in shock and turned to Parks, who still stood with only his head visible. It shamed him to admit he had forgotten that he had a wizard right there that he could ask questions of.

"Major Parks? You have something to say?"

Parks nodded and discarded his cloak entirely. He knew it was making the other men uncomfortable. "There are a number of ways that people can be controlled, but true control requires constant attention. If I were to take over Lord Mills, for example, I would need to be in close contact with him throughout his day to make sure he did what I wanted him to do. That's why I was very afraid when the Ambassador entered with Wiznicki accompanying him. A person being controlled has no real free will. Had he been controlling the Ambassador, he could have used him as a weapon.

"I may be wrong, sir, but I think what they are doing is controlling what information the President receives, rather than trying to control him directly. It's too easy to detect behavioral changes in a person."

Major looked at Parks thoughtfully, then he turned to the Ambassador. "For the first time today, I'm somewhat relieved. Now, Mister Ambassador, how are we going to go about freeing your President from this influence?"

Madison looked at Parks for a moment. "Can you spare a few men like Major Parks for a few days? I'm suddenly worried that the Embassy is not secure. There is a protocol covering the subversion of the Government and I can invoke it, but I'm reluctant to do so without alerting the President."

Major nodded thoughtfully. "Very well. I have an idea."

Major turned to Lord Mills and Sir Robert. "Gentlemen, thank you for your help. It's been very valuable. Please go back to Campbeltown

and alert the Weyrleader that I need his help with a matter of State. If I can pull this off, we'll need his help in a few weeks."

James blinked and nodded uncertainly. He didn't know what his PM had in mind, and that worried him.

"Yes, sir," James replied.

As he filed from the office with Sir Robert, he heard the PM ordering Major Parks to find some DPG wizards to provide security for the Ambassador for now.

Campbeltown Weyr, March 17th...

Harry walked into his quarters and tossed his jacket onto the bed. He had just finished supervising the first long distance jump for the riders. Their dragons were not ready for a jump Between with a rider, so the riders rode unbound dragons, while Harry gave jump images to the yearlings.

The smallest of the dragons was still over sixteen feet long and all had flown their riders for brief times. They were still developing their wings, so the dragons were strictly monitored when they had their riders onboard.

It had taken three hours to supervise the jumps, and he and Chekiath had been forced to make the jump between Disko and Campbeltown nearly thirty times. Both of them were exhausted, but the riders and their dragons had made the trip without any accidents. Now that they'd arrived, each had been installed in buildings much like Harry's.

Harry sat in a chair and rested for a moment, then he looked at Chekiath and noted the gray tinge. "Cheki, are you hungry? Tired?"

"A little of both, Harry. A tasty sheep or maybe one of Hagrid's fish would be real good right now."

Harry stood and stretched. "Well, I'm afraid we're out of fish, Cheki, but I'll take you over to the pens so you can pick out a nice, fresh snack."

Chekiath turned his huge head toward Harry and looked at him fondly, his eyes gently spinning and tinged blue. "A snack would do you good too. Or maybe you'll finally pick a female and cover her. I know you want to."

Harry laughed and thumped the dragon on the side. "You're not going to be happy until you get me laid, eh? If I didn't know better, and I do, I'd think you were spending too much time talking to Sirius."

"It would make you feel better. And you have a wide choice now. A strong male needs a large group of females to spread his attention, and you are the strongest male in the Weyr."

Harry shook his head. There was no denying the fact that Chekiath was now among the largest dragons in the Weyr and he was still growing. At fifty feet, he was only two feet shorter than Momnarth, his dam and he hadn't reached maturity yet. Harry was beginning to suspect he'd exceed the known size for the Imperial Horntail class of dragon.

What Harry failed to realize was that the bond was working in both directions. He was filling out in a very noticeable manner. He would never be very tall, but his shoulders and upper arms were bulking up from all the climbing up and down dragons he was doing.

"I don't know about being strongest, but I bet we're among the tiredest tonight," Harry said with a soft laugh.

"Yes, a snack and a nap will be nice. Will you cast that warming charm tonight?"

He smiled and nodded. "Just this one time, Cheki. You know the rule," he replied. All of the dragons found the warming charm to be a really nice thing, but Harry didn't want them to get dependent on it.

"Yes, we don't eat friends and we don't ask the wizards to cast charms because it isn't fair to the riders who aren't wizards," Cheki replied, sounding a bit unhappy with that last part. "Hermione lets Comaloth have a warming charm every night."

The reproach was unmistakeable in Cheki's tone.

Harry sighed. "I know, but she's not Weyrleader. We have to set an example. Besides, isn't your bed warm enough?"

"It is, but you usually join me when you cast the charm," replied the dragon.

Harry smiled as the real reason came to light. "Tell you what. Next time you want me to curl up with you, I will. Just try to aim your farts in a different direction."

"Harry! I only did that once! I didn't know that tuna would give me gas."

Harry shook his head and shuddered in recollection. He'd awoken, coughing and gagging to the worst smell he had ever experienced. It wouldn't have been bad, but he'd stumbled from Cheki's bed and stubbed his toe on the rocky uneven cave floor. He hopped around the Weyr on one foot, cursing a blue streak and glaring at Chekiath.

That set Cheki laughing, which caused the other dragons to laugh. Spurred on by Cheki's example, each dragon with a rider tried to arrange for their rider to experience a dragon fart up close and personal.

The riders were not very happy with their Weyrleader's dragon that day.

When Sirius learned of it he thought it was the funniest prank ever, until Norendrath arranged to leave about eight hundred pounds of dragon dung in front of Sirius' tent opening. The pile was chest high, and thanks to the anti-apparation ward Remus had placed on the tent, he was forced to climb over the pile while sixty dragons rumbled and trumpeted with laughter.

Harry led his dragon to the pen where they kept the herd for the dragons. They had recently made some changes to how they were managing the herd, thanks to Lord Mills. Now they were actively trying to let the herd breed its own replacements.

James and May were holding classes for everyone on animal husbandry so that everyone could take a turn in helping maintain the flocks. Fortunately, the old air base had plenty of grassland that the flocks could use for grazing.

As a result of these changes, the Weyr now sported a pen for those sheep marked for food, and a large herd that was kept isolated from the main Weyr.

Chekiath leapt over the fence and after a short glide, snatched up an adult sheep. The animal bawled loudly and he pumped his wings, pulling away from the flock. He would move a good distance away before landing to eat. The dragons didn't want to panic the herd by eating in the same enclosed pen as the herd.

"Harry?"

He raised his head from where he had been resting it against the fence and looked over at May. "Hi. Are you all settled in?"

She nodded. "I am, but I think Trath is going to spend the next hour adjusting the sands until her bed is just right."

He chuckled. Dragons were all about personal comfort when it came to their Weyrs. "Chekiath spent half a day pushing sand around, and to be honest, I couldn't see any difference from what he ended up with and what he started with."

"Harry," May said, then she looked very embarrassed. "Are dragons always so blunt?"

"Let me guess. Trath has been offering you rather frank suggestions about your love life. Even going as far as urging you to pick a nice boy to clutch with? Perhaps making frank observations about how some of the boys seem to stack up to each other?"

She looked down and Harry chuckled. "Welcome to the club. I'm not going to repeat Chekiath's suggestions. What I do know is that if I followed his advice I'd have several girls out for my blood."

She glanced at him quizzically and he smiled. "May, it's important to remember that while your dragon is very intelligent, she isn't human. She doesn't have human reactions to certain behaviors and it's not fair to expect human morals from her. Like it or not, you have to understand that your dragon wants you happy and equates mating and procreation as part of the path to happiness."

"Doesn't it bother you?" she asked.

He shrugged. "It used to, but what can I do about it? I've spoken to Cheki on a number of occasions and as smart as he is, he doesn't understand what the big deal is. Now I just shrug and try to laugh it off. I am used to the idea that he will embarrass me. In fact, I think he enjoys doing it."

"You do turn a wonderful red, Harry. And since I'm nearly done eating, we could go back to our Weyr and you could mate with May if you want."

He groaned and glared at his dragon in the distance.

May turned beet red, then she giggled. "I see what you mean."

Harry rolled his eyes and sighed

"Oh, I meant to tell you. Lord Mills wanted to see you," she said. "Talk to you later!" With a wave, she turned and walked away briskly.

Harry stared at her moving away and couldn't help but be drawn to her form, then he shook his head. "Cheki," he said with a bit of a whine, "if you keep this up and I'll never mate with any of them because you keep scaring them away."

"Your mating rituals are too drawn out, Harry. Find a female you admire and take her," Chekiath pronounced, "I'm done eating, so I'll go take my nap while you talk with Sheep Guy."

Harry sighed and nodded, then he walked off to find James.

The emergence of dragons onto the world stage triggered violent upheaval in several areas of the globe as some nations recognized the potential the dragons had to destroy their economies. Fortunately, such upheavals were few and strictly limited in scope. After the OPEC war, the nations of the world banded together with the dragons to address the problems for the affected nations.

Excerpted from *The Weyrs of Earth* by Remus John Lupin, published 2040.

Author's Notes and Mockeries:

- Starting off with a serious issue here. Our stories are published on Fan Fiction dot net and at our Yahoo group. We ask that no one repost them elsewhere. Lately I have been swamped with messages of our stories appearing without permission on other websites. Including this story. I have contacted the owners of said sites and asked them to pull them down.

- A lot of people have left reviews about the dragons providing the wizards with blood via a blood donation kind of effort. Lets be realistic here folks. If wizards had been killing your race for generations would be willing to go out of your way to help them? Besides, blood and heartstrings are only two of the products obtained from killing dragons, so even providing blood and scales won't solve the problem.

- One of our reviewers noted this was the only Harry Potter/Dragonrider of Pern cross over he had ever read. Well that's to be expected. On this system there aren't even ten such stories, none nearly as big as this and none complete. One seems to be written in Polish. So I'm not surprised this is the only one he's read. And Alyx is just surprised that he can read.

- To all those people complementing Alyx and sending her llamas, please stop! Her head has gotten so swollen her helmet no longer fits and one of the llamas is running around wearing her bustier.

- We realize that the pacing is slow, but the simple fact was that it wasn't possible to go from Harry impressing to others impressing without a lot of things happening. A LOT OF THINGS. Setting up the first Weyr and finding a reason for the muggles to want to help them is going to take time and its not going to be an easy road. I'm not giving away the store here when I say the wizards are only the tip of the iceberg facing the establishment of dragons of Earth.

- Drifter950. You can't possibly expect to be left out here can you? You leave a review for a totally different story, at least I hope so, otherwise, share the drugs man. I mean your review made no sense at all so you get entered into the Bob and Alyx's Hall of WTF? Yes that's right, you can tell all your friends you got mocked by Bob and Alyx. Your prize has been sent via donkey to pango pango, it should arrive in a few years. I hope you like fresh cheese cake, because it won't be fresh by the time it arrives.

- Shippers. Lord I love listening to people whine and complain about their favorite/least favorite ship. I will say this for the record. Harry will have a relationship, but before it settles down there will be some deliberately misleading elements. So for all those threatening to stop reading if they don't see a Harry/Hermione or a Harry/May or Harry/Hagrid (yes there are some truly twisted folks out there), I'd suggest either leaving now or sticking in there and wait til the dust settles.

- Tumshie, thanks for the Brit pick. I guess its a good thing I didn't go with my first thought and call her the old biddy? :D

- Regarding Between. It will be discussed in later chapters, but I'll point out for the record right now that Between is not at absolute zero, nor is it a total vacuum. Hold your questions, you'll find out more later.

- Ez21 no really, tell us how you feel!

- A lot of people didn't care that Amelia bit the dust, but there is a madness to my method. Betrayals within betrayals and when the dust settles, the one in real control at the ministry is going to surprise people I think.

- And finally I'm going to answer some questions we've been getting. No. No. Yes. Oh hell yeah! Not on your life! No. No. No. I hope that clears things up.

Standard Disclaimer:

The curtain opened and Bob and Alyx sat at a couple of desks facing the audience.

"Hi! I'm Bob," said Bob, smiling brightly.

"And I'm Alyx," said Alyx.

"And this is the Bob and Alyx disclaimer!" they said in unison.

Both stopped and turned to look at the other with a shudder. "That was totally creepy," Bob exclaimed.

"Yeah," grinned Alyx. "Let's do it again!"

"No no, we have to follow the new format, remember?" Bob replied.

"Fine, let me grab a letter," she grumbled, then she rooted around on her desk.

"Since we've had so many people asking questions about our disclaimers, we thought we'd answer them. Take it Alyx!"

Alyx held up a sheet of charred paper that was dripping blood. "Lamebrain1497 writes, 'How come you don't invite Snape back for more disclaimers? I really liked them.'"

Bob looked up with a terrible gleam in his eye. "Well Lamebrain, the truth is Snape plays a minor role in this story and therefore isn't worthy of being used in a disclaimer. As much as we'd like to do something like this."

He pressed a button on his desk and suddenly Snape fell from the sky. He hit the floor with a meaty thump and blood sprayed in every direction.

"Say the words Snapey," Alyx cooed lovingly.

"They don't own Harry Potter. For gods sake someone help me!" Snape gasped.

Suddenly a truck fell from the sky, landing on Snape.

Bob pressed another button and the mess instantly vanished. "So you see, without Snape in the story we really can't do Snape disclaimers. It just wouldn't be right!"

"That's true! But, stay tuned! Next week we force the Dahli Lama and the Pope to go three rounds of kick boxing in a steel cage hanging over a pit of crocodiles!" Alyx exclaimed happily.

Bob nodded. "Yup, its going to be something. But for now, let's start the story."

Once culled a typical Hungarian Horntail produces over two hundred different products, including heartstrings, twenty five to thirty gallons of dragons blood, four hundred pounds of prime gourmet dragon cutlets and various other ingredients that are used in forty two different potions. Tanned leather is converted into belts, bags and shoes. The Ukrainian Ironbelly is additionally used for chest armor for Aurors world wide.

Excerpt from Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find them by Newt Scamander. Published 1927.

Campbeltown Weyr, Hangar #2, March 18th...

Harry waited until the riders had assembled with their dragons, then he signaled to Remus, who shut the doors to the large building.

Harry climbed the steps to the platform and faced his riders. "Good morning," he said softly. "In a moment I am going to turn this meeting over to Lord Mills, who will fill in many of the details about what's happening. First, however, I want to give you a brief outline."

"In two days time, the Weyr will be receiving two very special guests. We will be providing security for their meeting and making sure that only authorized personnel are allowed anywhere near the Weyr on that day.

"I'm sure you are all aware that Prime Minister Major was obliterated by the Ministry of Magic, in direct violation of the treaties that existed between the Crown and the Ministry. The problem goes far deeper than we ever expected. It turns out that the British Government is

not the only government to be suffering from some form of manipulation by the magical governments.

"You should know, however, that these situations came to light because of our dragons. In two days, the Prime Minister of Great Britain and the President of the United States will meet here. It is fully expected that part of the President's security detail will be wizards, who will attempt to prevent their President from learning the truth.

"Today a group of twenty wizards friendly to our host government will arrive and attach themselves to our guard force under the overall command of Captain Atkins. Our role is a simple one. Keep out of sight unless things don't go the way we hope them to go."

Harry paused and looked around. "If that happens, Hagrid on Selanth and Momnarth will grab the Prime Minister and the President and take them to the Hatching Weyr. Mister Granger, Remus and Lord Mills will also be on dragon back, in case they need to go to Disko to calm our guests. We all know how frightening that first time Between is."

Harry glanced at Lord Mills and motioned for the man to stand. "I'll turn this over to James and he'll explain why this is happening and what it all means."

As he walked off the platform he noticed Captain Atkins speaking intently into her phone. Changing directions, he joined her.

"Hang on," she said into the phone, then looked at Harry quizzically. "Yes?"

"Is there a problem?"

She frowned. "I'm not sure. We have someone at the main gate who is asking to speak with his daughter. He claims to be Miss Lovegood's father, but the guard says he's a wreck. He looks like a homeless person."

"Luna?" Harry said softly.

Luna's head popped up and she turned to eye him. She hadn't heard him say her name, but she knew she was the subject of their

conversation. She smiled and moved to join them, knowing that she'd either clear up their confusion, or greatly add to it. Either would be fun, though in different ways.

Harry held up a hand to Atkins. who paused and waited for Luna to join them.

"Luna," Harry said, "There's someone at the main gate claiming to be your father."

She frowned slightly and Harry was struck by how pretty she was. "Daddy's here? He didn't reply to my last letter, so I thought he might coming here."

"You told him where we were?" exclaimed Atkins in dismay.

"Of course I didn't," replied Luna serenely. "I sent him a letter telling him how happy I was and that I would contact him when I could. Knowing Daddy, he started heading this way the day he got it. I bet he didn't even pack his hairbrush."

"Luna, this place is hidden. How could he have found us?" asked Harry. He glanced over at Atkins, who was staring at the blond witch in confusion. He repressed a smile, knowing that Luna often had this affect on people.

Luna smiled happily. "It's one of our family talents. Daddy can always tell where I'm at, as long as I'm on the ground or he's on the ground. Which means he probably walked here. Flying on a broom or apparating confuses the talent something awful."

She paused and frowned. "I bet my going to the Hatching Weyr must have really confused him."

"I'll say," Harry replied dryly. "How about this, Captain? Luna and I will go see if the man at the gates really is her father. If he isn't, I'll leave him in your hands. If he is, we'll let him in and talk to him."

Atkins frowned. "I don't like this. With our special guests coming in two days, it's a risk" she said pensively.

"Oh, don't worry about that. Daddy doesn't care about little men. He's more interested in exposing the Heliopath conspiracy," Luna said with a wave, dismissing her complaint.

Harry rolled his eyes and tugged on her sleeve. "Come on, we'll take Chekiath."

Luna smiled sweetly and in a loud voice said. "Really? You want me to ride your dragon? Shouldn't we date first?"

Harry groaned and everyone in the hangar turned to look at the pair in shock. Luna had been heard by everyone.

"I like her, Harry. I bet she'd be fun to mate with," Chekiath pronounced.

"Shut up, you," Harry growled, then he tugged on a giggling Luna, pulling him towards his dragon.

Campbeltown Weyr, Security Office, March 18th...

Captain Atkins walked into her office and skidded to a halt. Harry leaned against a wall with his arms folded across his chest, while Luna fussed over a very disheveled man in dirty clothing. It looked like he hadn't been eating well at all lately.

"Daddy, why didn't you just apparate home each night, then apparate back to where you started in the morning?"

Xenophilius blinked owlishly at his daughter. "I could have, but you know that apparating is dangerous in the evenings. I might have encountered an apparation apparition. You know how dangerous they are! Besides, I had a good fix on your direction and I didn't want to lose that, pumpkin."

Dobby appeared with a tray containing a large pot of tea and several sandwiches.

"Oh, I say! Marvelous. Simply marvelous. I've worked up quite an appetite walking here," Xenophilius declared.

Luna sighed and shook her head. "What have I told you about remembering to eat, Daddy?"

Xenophilius stared at his daughter and blinked. Clearly this was a trick question because he couldn't remember her telling him any such thing!

"I'm not sure, pumpkin. You told me that on the same day I that I was worrying about the Hot Sauce Hostage Crisis in Barcelona," He replied smoothly. Two could play her game!

Luna frowned. How could she have forgotten something so important!

Atkins moved to stand next to Harry. "Are they insane?" she whispered.

He chuckled and shook his head. "No, not at all. They're just very unique, even for wizards," he replied in a whisper.

Luna turned and smiled brightly at him. "I think you're special too, Harry," she said, then turned back to her father, who was plowing through his pile of sandwiches.

"So, pumpkin, you're safe and happy here?" he asked.

"Yes, Daddy. I was going to send you a letter telling you all about it, and asking you to visit when you could, but you beat me to it."

He nodded, then jerked a thumb at Harry. "And him? He's being a gentleman and behaving himself?"

Luna sighed and nodded, looking a little unhappy with that answer.

Xenophilius blinked again and looked at Harry more closely. "Maybe he's sick. Take him to a healer, girl. I would have expected him to at least try to see what color panties you wear."

Harry stared at the man with his jaw on the floor and Luna giggled. "Now, Daddy, leave Harry be. I like him just fine as he is. Besides, when he's ready, I'm sure he'll be properly aggressive, though he could simply ask what color my panties are."

Xenophilius nodded, then stood. "Well, since you're safe and happy, it's time for me to get home. I have a newspaper to publish, you know."

"Yes Daddy, we know."

Xenophilius leaned in and kissed his daughter on the cheek, then he walked from the office. Harry stared at the doorway in shock.

"Where's he going?" exclaimed Atkins.

"Daddy's going home," Luna declared. "He just wanted to make sure I was safe."

"He's walking?" asked Captain Atkins.

Luna nodded. "He's really terrible at apparating. I can't tell you how many times he splinched himself and sent his private parts to various celebrities. Each time he claims it's an accident, but I think it's a bid for attention. Celestina Warbuck was most put out to find his penis on her pillow one morning."

Luna walked from the office, leaving Harry and Captain Atkins shuddering.

Hangar #7, Campbeltown Weyr, March 19th...

May felt like she was twisting into a pretzel. She was sure any moment one of her vertebra would snap.

"Do yeh see it?" asked Hagrid.

"I think so," she replied with a grunt.

"If yeh don' see it, push it to one side."

"No, wait, I have it!" she exclaimed.

"Good. Now give it a squirt," Hagrid replied.

A moment later, May crawled out from under Cnordth. "That was a tough one!" she exclaimed.

"Yeah. The trick was in knowin' tha' Cnordth had a scale problem tha' seemed to go away, then he started in with a fever," agreed Hagrid. "In this case, yeh had to find the scale tha' first started the problem, an' push it out o' the way so yeh could expose the infection below. We'll need to rinse the area three times a day an' start him on the antibiotics."

May shook her head and gently patted Cnordth's side. "You're going to be restricted to the infirmary for a couple days, Cnordth. I'm sorry that the food won't be very good."

"I'll get him a pain potion," Hagrid said, standing and stretching, then he turned and walked to where they kept the buckets he used to deliver potions.

"Thank you, May. Thank you Hagrid. I do not like feeling so sick," Cnordth said. "It is unsettling."

"You're in good hands with Hagrid," May said softly.

"I'm in good hands with either of you, Weyrhealer," Cnordth replied. "Trath is a lucky dragon to have you as her rider."

May blushed and looked down. "I'm still training, Cnordth. I'm not a healer yet," she murmured.

"Perhaps not yet, but you will be. Just like the Weyrleader is the only one who can be the Weyrleader, you could be nothing but a Weyrhealer."

She pat Cnordth's side again and the dragon turned his big head to watch Hagrid.

Hagrid was pouring several mixtures into a bucket, which he would then give to the dragon. The potion was an invention of his. At its base was the standard potion to relieve pain. To that, he'd added additional ingredients to increase the effectiveness when used on dragons.

May turned away from the dragon and placed the plastic squeeze bottle on the cart they used in the infirmary. The developing infection and pustule would need to be flushed several times a day. It was in a very bad place for the dragon. The front armpit was nearly

impossible to bandage and any movement tended to rub away any medicine, while irritating the wound.

She paused in putting the supplies away. We need a better way of binding these wound and infections, she thought. I'll talk to Hagrid about it later.

Hogwarts Transfiguration Office, March 20th...

Minerva entered the room and immediately stopped. She looked around for a moment, then pulled her wand and pointed it at a blank spot on the wall.

"Show yourself before I turn you into a newt," she hissed.

"Damn animagus senses," muttered Croaker, then he canceled his disillusion charm.

Minerva relaxed slightly, then motioned toward a chair. "Sit, Alejandro, and explain why your skulking around my office."

She moved behind her desk, never once putting her wand away or pointing it anywhere but at him.

"Minerva," he said with a sigh. "I'm in a bind and I need your help."

She arched an eyebrow. "May I remind you that I don't work for you anymore? Nor do I have any obligation to help you?"

He held up a hand placatingly and she tensed. "I know, I know, but I don't think you're aware of the disaster we're heading into. I need to get in touch with Albus and you're the only one he communicates with on a regular basis."

"Why don't you explain this disaster?" She had a good idea what he was referring to but wanted more information.

He nodded. "You've seen the ads for the Wizard Defense Forces?"

She nodded, her lips thinning in disapproval. "Of course. There is considerable interest among some of the seventh year students, since it offers new career paths. Foolishness, if you ask me."

"Or a path to an early grave," Croaker said unhappily. "Look, Minerva, discourage them any way you can. The Ministry is forming the WDF with one goal in mind; they're going to attack Gringotts and wrest control of their dragons away from them."

"Are they insane?" she exclaimed. "They'd need thousands of wizards and the Goblins will wreck our economy."

He nodded in agreement. She knew the true history of the Goblin wars. Everyone who worked in his department knew the truth.

"I agree, but they seem to feel that training up a bunch of wizards to use the unforgivables against goblins is going to be adequate. They have close to four hundred now and are looking to recruit from Hogwarts. Their goal is to have five hundred, at least."

"And when the goblins recall every galleon they've minted and we're all suddenly broke?" she asked acidly.

He shrugged. "I don't think it's going to be much worse than what we're already starting to see. Some Ministries are coming close to fiscal collapse, thanks to the dragon crisis. We're a little bit better off only because we never had a large population of dragons to begin with. Some countries, however, relied on the dragon products for forty to sixty percent of their economies.

"Even if we obtain control over the Gringotts dragons, we'll still end up losing because our economy is too tightly linked to the other countries."

"And Fudge and his toadies aren't willing to recognize that fact," Minerva said tightly.

"In a nutshell, yes. Look, Minerva, you know what I'm supposed to do with my department. You know what its full charter says. But I have three operatives, including myself, and eight researchers. I just don't have the people to do what I need. That's why I need to contact Albus."

She looked at him knowingly. "You know Albus isn't going to help you incite a revolution."

"I know," he said looking pained. "But I suspect he might be in touch with people who might help."

She sighed. "Leave your note and I'll ask Fawkes if he will deliver it next time he stops by."

Croaker nodded and pulled out a small rolled scroll. "Thank you, Minerva."

She waved him off. "Don't thank me. He may not help you or be in a position to help. I honestly don't know what he's been up to, except in broad terms."

He stood and smiled, then placed the note on her desk, then he shimmered as he reapplied the disillusion charm on himself. She waited until her door opened, then closed, before she took the parchment and placed it in a drawer.

Campbeltown Weyr, Hangar #2, March 20th...

Two different helicopters approached the airfield from different directions. A group of very visible British Army soldiers provided perimeter security. The first helicopter landed in front of Hangar #2 and rolled to a stop. While the blades slowed, a British Army Humvee pulled up and several men got out. Once the blades stopped the door opened and Prime Minister Major stepped from the helicopter, followed by Ambassador Madison.

He stood and waited while the Humvee towed the helicopter out of the way, placing it near the side of the hangar.

The Prime Minister and the American Ambassador waited on the cold tarmac looking around for a while, then they heard the heavy sound of a US Navy Helicopter approaching from the east. Ostensibly, the President had been on tour of various NATO facilities and meetings with NATO Heads when he suddenly changed his plans and opted for a one day visit to a US Carrier formation that was exercising with the Royal Navy in the Irish sea.

The President had managed to use the excuse of being on a US Military warship to divest himself of most of his security detail, except for a ten man personal guard. He had been warned of problems via the director of the Central Intelligence Agency but

there were no specifics other than a coded message from Ambassador Madison warning that the President's security forces had been compromised and that it was vital that he met with the British Prime Minister who had important information for him about dragons!

The navy aircraft landed and the door opened, allowing the five security agents on duty to step out and survey the area.

The Prime Minister and the Ambassador stepped forward. John Major smiled and held out a hand to a man he had mixed feelings for. One thing had been constant all his life; the Americans and the British generally looked out for each other and their interests. That wasn't to say that sometimes there weren't conflicts of interest, but they were rare and usually they were able to work them out so that both sides were happy.

"There's hot drinks and a comfortable conference room inside," he said, then he lead the President into an open door in Hangar Two. The security detail took up positions outside and were caught completely by surprise by a truck, which pulled up and unloaded nearly twenty British army commandos, fully kitted and ready for a fight. It didn't take much to disarm the Secret Service agents, who were then led into another room where they would be checked for illegal spells and subjected to Veritaserum from the British wizards.

Those who passed the tests would be briefed on the problems and given bracelets made by Albus Dumbledore so that would know if they'd been subjected to magic. It was expected that the security detail would be clean. What was also expected was that there would be others, unseen by the standard security detail.

The Prime Minister entered the large paneled meeting room and went to a chair, then waited for the Ambassador and the President to sit.

"Sir," said the Ambassador, "believe it or not, the last time we spoke, we were attacked by members of our own Department of Magic."

The President's eyes bulged and he stared at his Ambassador, who nodded solemnly.

"It's true, sir. I didn't believe it myself until I came back here and was shown the video tape from my last meeting with Prime Minister Major. My memory of that meeting had been erased, all because our British friends had discovered that the Magical world is routinely killing intelligent lifeforms, some similar to humans, though not always."

The president opened his mouth to say something when two sharp shots rang out and from behind him. Two forms appeared and slumped to the ground. Both forms were only partially visible.

"Your minders, Mister President," John Major said quietly. "Now that they are out of action, we'll be able to talk and plan."

The President looked at the two men on the floor as they were disarmed. Who ever had shot them fired to disable and both were moaning, while several British Security agents, wearing infrared goggles, placed them in handcuffs.

It was suddenly clear to the President that the Department of Magic had greatly overstepped their mandate of office and was only a short step from taking over the government.

The President turned to his Ambassador. "Would you kindly ask Captain Stimson to come in?"

Ambassador nodded and hurriedly left the room. Captain Stimson was carrying the "football", a locked briefcase containing top secret war plans. It also contained plans for such contingencies as he now faced. The American government had long worried that the Department of Magic may someday turn against them. They had a plan for such an eventuality.

The President didn't want to call the planners paranoid, but he felt the plan for facing off a possible revolt led by the Department of Agriculture was a bit much. There were dozens of such plans and now he found himself glad they existed.

"Sir, with your permission, and until you have adequate coverage, I would like you to accept the loan of some properly trained security officers who are wizards working for us. We can call them observers, attached to your detail. If your wizarding world is as bad as ours,

then finding replacements and getting them trained up can be done in a couple of months," Major said.

The President nodded and smiled for the first time in a week. The butterflies in his stomach were finally dissolving. Ever since the Director of the Central Intelligence Agency alerted him to the problem, he had been on edge and worried. Assassination was always a possibility, but no President wanted to think that it would come from the very people charged with preventing such a thing.

The President glanced up when the Ambassador and Captain Stimson arrived. He held out a hand and the captain looked shocked, then he hurriedly released his handcuff and handed the President the case. He opened it and pulled out a yellow book, rather than the typical red ones. "Captain Stimson, do you have your secure satellite phone on you?" asked the president.

"Yes, sir," the man said with a touch of fear. He didn't know what was happening, but he knew it was big. The plans he carried in that case could destroy the world!

The president opened the book to the first page and read it briefly. "Very well. Dial this number, then hand me the phone." He read off a series of numbers longer than a regular phone number.

With a trembling hand, Stimson did as directed, then handed over the phone. He didn't know what was going on, but the President was activating one of the government emergency plans.

The President took the phone and waited for the the appropriate connections to be made. Once the connection was established, he spoke briefly to the person on the other side. "This is the President. Authorization 069832734B3R3. I am activating Plan 1437B, codenamed Wayward, option Orange. Repeat, plan 1437B, codenamed Wayward, option Orange. Repeat that back, please."

The President listened for a moment longer then he simply said, "Confirmed." and passed the phone back to Stimson, who broke the connection. The President looked at the Captain, who seemed very young, and smiled to reassure him. "It's not as bad as it sounds, son. We're in for a bit of rough weather, but I'm sure we'll be just fine."

He then turned back to the football and placed the plan book back into the briefcase before handing it back to Stimson with another smile of thanks. Things weren't perfect, but the US government was now on alert and would very shortly wrest control of the Department of Magic and return it to the federal government.

The President waited until Stimson had left the room then he turned to Major. "John, one thing bothers me. I always thought you British were smarter, but really, a cover story about dragons?"

John Major grinned at him. "I know how crazy it sounds, but how would you like to meet some?"

The President blinked in surprise. "You're serious?"

Major nodded. "I haven't met them myself yet, but I have a number of very reliable people working with them. What do you say? Would you like to meet an intelligent species that has been on the planet longer than we have?"

The President nodded eagerly and followed the Prime Minister from the building.

Hangar #2, Campbeltown Weyr...

"Milli, what are the signs that you've overextended Tarianth?" Harry asked.

Millicent Bulstrode had come into her own since coming to the Weyr. In Slytherins house she was just a lonely, not very attractive girl, who existed on the outskirts of the various factions. But in the Weyr, she had true friends and no one really cared what she looked like. She was united with the others via their common love of dragons and that had caused the reticent girl to blossom. She smiled more and everyone who'd known her at Hogwarts were amazed at the changes in the girl.

"A slight gray tinge to the coloring. I think another sign is a sloppy reentry from Between, close to where you wanted to go, but not quite there," she replied.

Harry looked up and smiled broadly at her. "Thank you," he said. "I had been wondering about that, but I thought I was imagining it. I'll have to see it gets added to our handbook."

Millicent leaned back against her dragon and several of the riders nodded to her. They recognized their handbook was a work in progress and were thankful for every bit of information that got added to it. Barely a week went by without Hermione handing out new pages to be inserted into their books.

"Harry?"

He turned to see Sir Robert standing next to two unmistakable figures who were staring open mouthed at the dragons. He blinked in surprise. He hadn't expected to meet with anyone today unless they needed the dragons as added support.

"Stand up, everyone!" he sent to the Weyr.

Harry walked over to Sir Robert. Chekiath followed along a few steps behind. As one, the riders scrambled to their feet and moved into a loose formation. Each rider stood to the right of their dragon.

"Sir Robert, is there a problem?" asked Harry.

The old man shook his head. "No my boy, no problem at all. But I would like you to meet some special people."

He turned to his two guests, who were staring at Chekiath fearfully. "Sirs, if I may, I'd like to introduce you to Weyrleader Harry Potter, and his dragon Chekiath, who was hatched in mid November."

Harry smiled and waited, allowing Cheki to make the opening move. "It is nice to meet new humans," Chekiath said. "Please be welcome to our Weyr. Harry says you are the Lord Holders of your own people."

Both Prime Minister Major and the President stood staring at the large dragon. Chekiath was just slightly longer than his mother now and he was among the largest dragons in the Weyr. Remus and Albus speculated that magic was helping all of the dragons with their amazing growth rates as the bonded dragons were growing at two to three times faster than normal.

"I heard a voice in my head, just like they said," Major muttered in shock.

"Gentlemen, if I may, I would like to introduce you to Spath. He is the oldest living dragon. While dragons reckon time in a manner similar to ours, it's not quite as precise. Near as we can figure, Spath is over 300 years old," Harry said softly.

The ancient horntail stepped forward. "Welcome, Lord Holders, to our Weyr. Please do not be alarmed. While you are here you are under the protection of our Weyrleader and our Weyr."

"Lord Holders?" Prime Minister Major said, then turned a quizzical eye to Sir Robert.

"The dragons have a long history going back to their origins, sir. They remember the time before they came to this world and they remember the life they had there. As a result, they tend to equate things to what they've experienced before. On their home world, national rulers were called Lord Holders, just like the human that commanded the dragons was called Weyrleader. Certain human behaviors escape the dragons ability to understand. I could explain all day the difference between a President and a Prime Minister and they would still call you both Lord Holder."

Sir Robert paused and smiled. "It's rather refreshing, actually. They are the ultimate in social mathematicians, boiling everything down to their simplest elements. Truly, you are both leaders of your nations where the differences in your jobs and power are not that extreme. Lord Holder is as good a term as any. It is a frame of reference they can understand and imparts, for them, the same respect."

Major and the President had been called a lot worse in their careers. To be called a Lord Holder by an alien species was a perfectly acceptable title in their book.

"On behalf of the United Kingdom and Her Majesty, I thank you for your kind words. It is my fondest wish that we can work together for the betterment of the world we share," Major said softly.

Spath looked briefly at Harry, who nodded to the big dragon. "You honor us, Lord Holder. We also look forward to a time when man no longer hunts our kind or treats us like the mindless food beasts."

"Food beasts?" asked the President.

"Sheep and cattle," murmured Harry. "The wizards deny that dragons are intelligent and treat them like one would treat a cow raised for slaughter."

The President nodded thoughtfully, then he turned an eye on Harry. "What's your role in this? They called you Weyrleader?"

Harry shrugged. "There are over ten thousand dragons world wide and all of them look to me for guidance and protection. I am not very comfortable with the role, but it's the role I must play. There will come a time when I and my people will work side by side with humans. Dragon riders and their dragons will earn their place in your society as partners."

The President looked alarmed at Harry's words.

The Prime Minister placed a hand on his shoulder and shook his head. "I know this is a shock to you, but we're ready to give you a complete briefing on the matter. Please allow me to explain things before you jump to conclusions."

The President looked chagrined and he nodded.

The Prime Minister turned to Harry. "Weyrleader, I have been made aware of the circumstances of your elevation to power and I have met with several of your council. I find myself not only understanding what you are trying to accomplish, but I am determined to help you achieve that goal."

Harry gave the Prime Minister a smile and a slight bow and all of the dragons in the building thrummed in approval.

Harry watched as Sir Robert led the two leaders around the hangar where they'd frequently stop to talk to a dragon. Harry knew he should have followed them, but he held back.

"Something is upsetting you, Harry," Chekiath said.

Harry knew instinctively when a dragon was talking privately or not, and Cheki was talking privately.

"Things have been going our way for too long, Cheki. Nothing really bad is happening here in Britain. That bothers me."

Chekiath was silent for a minute, just looking at him and Harry could feel the dragon examining their bond very closely. "Instincts are powerful things," Cheki said finally. "It would be wrong to ignore them."

Harry nodded to himself. "Let's think about calling a Weyr meeting later, just us riders."

Chekiath nodded and he followed Harry as he hurried to catch up with Sir Robert and their guests.

Diagon Alley, March 22nd...

Harry was right. Trouble was right on the horizon, but it wasn't aimed at him and the dragons.

There were twenty men in the group that apparated to Diagon Alley. They wore the distinctive purple plumed hats of the Wizard Defense Forces, along with the lemon yellow cloaks. The black silk shirts and white breeches might have looked fashionable to Delores Umbridge, but few others agreed with her.

This was the first time the WDF had appeared officially in any wizard location. The sudden appearance of so many wizards in uniform caused a buzz to ripple through the alley and a good many people looked at them with some suspicion.

One man with a pair of bars visible on his hat gestured and the men split up into groups of two. Each pair headed to their assigned destination with the intent of putting up recruiting posters either on the buildings or hanging from the inside windows of the shops.

Most shop keepers allowed them to place the posters inside their shops, but there were two notable exceptions.

Floean Fortescue looked up when the two uniformed members of the WDF entered.

"Good morning, gentlemen," he called jovially. "Can I interest you in our special? I call it Chocolate Demise, sporting sixteen flavors of chocolate, served on a slab of chocolate cake and smothered in hot chocolate sauce!"

Both men shook their heads and one thrust out a poster that would cover a good deal of space. "No, thank you. We're just here to hang this in your window."

Floean looked at the poster and frowned. His shop had a lot of children coming to it and he did not want them to think he was advocating their joining this nonsense.

"No, I don't think so," he replied. "The Ministry hasn't the right to put that in my window and I don't want my customers seeing it. If some other shop owners allow it, that's their business. But this is my shop and I decide what goes in my windows."

The two men exchanged a look, then the man carrying the poster nodded to his companion. He stepped forward and before Floean could react, he grabbed the older man and hit him hard with a small club he was carrying. Floean gasped and doubled over clutching at his stomach. That was the opening the man needed and he started to beat the ice cream shop owner about his head and shoulders with his club. In less than a minute Floean was on the floor weeping and moaning in pain.

"Now then," said the first man, "as I was saying, we intend to place this in your window. Do you have any objections?"

Severely injured Floean moaned and writhed on the floor, ignoring the two men entirely.

"I didn't think so," the man said, smirking, then he handed the poster to his companion. "Put this up in the window, right smack in the center, since our good citizen here is volunteering for it."

He looked down at Floean and sneered. "Next time, old man, you'll do as your told or we'll bring you in for questioning, or worse, target practice," he snarled, then he gestured to his companion to hurry up.

In another shop, two men confronted another wizard and made the mistake of taking his abilities much too lightly. Garrick Ollivander was probably one of the strongest and most knowledgeable wizards after Dumbledore and Croaker. Voldemort and Potter would have been on the list, but Harry wasn't fully trained as a wizard and Voldemort was too busy confounding muggle scientists to worry about his standing in magical society.

"What do you mean you won't allow us to put up our recruiting poster?" demanded a member of the WDF.

"I would say intelligence isn't a requirement of your little band then," Ollivander said shortly. "I thought my refusal was quite clear."

"You can't refuse. This is a direct order of Undersecretary Umbridge!"

"That cow? She couldn't cast a lumos with a fresh wand. I wonder who she blackmailed to get put in charge of your little group," Ollivander said with disdain. These little men were starting to irritate him.

"That's it!" snarled one of the men. He reached for his wand, intending to put this old man in his place.

Garrick barely flicked his wand and the other man flew through the plate glass window they wanted to use for the poster.

"Sonny," Ollivander said to the other man, "I suggest you run back to your masters and tell them that Ollivander's has been here since 382 BC and we have never bowed to a Dark Lord or an upstart Ministry that doesn't have the authority to order citizens around."

The man ran outside and helped his friend to his feet. The injured man swayed slightly and pulled out his wand. "Incendio!" he shouted.

A pale yellow flame erupted from his wand and it splashed harmlessly against a shield cast by Ollivander from inside the store. Unfortunately for Ollivander, the WDF man's actions attracted the attention of his friends, who came running.

Within a minute, Ollivander was exchanging shots through the window of his shop and ten members of the WDF. Ollivander was a deadly shot; what he aimed for he invariably hit. The five WDF men on the ground in front of the shop were all it took to force the remaining ten to take cover.

"Stop!" shouted two Aurors, who ran up the street from the direction of the Leaky Cauldron. "Ministry Aurors, we command you to put down your wands!"

One of the WDF men turned and fired off an explosive curse that hit an Auror in the chest. He crumpled to the ground and lay in a slowly growing pool of blood. The second Auror dove into a shop and took cover.

Ollivander used the distraction to activate a special ward on the front of his shop. To the amazement of all who beheld it, the shop started to shift. The spell, created by the same Ollivander who had created the shifting bricks spell for the Diagon Alley portal, was more advanced than the portal spell. The shop slowly shrunk as the bricks folded and shifted in on themselves. When it was down to a small box, no bigger than a milk crate, it vanished entirely.

Ollivander's was gone. Only a large empty hole marked where it once lay.

The WDF force, seeing their quarry vanish, activated portkeys taking all of them out of the alley.

The surviving Auror limped from the shop and stared at his partner of five years, now dead on the ground, killed by a member of the Ministry and his blood started to boil.

Campbeltown Weyr, March 22nd...

Harry emerged high above Campbeltown on Chekiath. Half a breathe later, another twenty dragons appeared, including Selanth with Hagrid and Momnarth. They had just returned from Lac Logipi, where Harry had inspected the changes made by Dobby's elves and the dragons. The intent was to provide some cover so the individual Weyrs weren't so exposed.

He wanted to make sure each dragon in that Weyr had a place to sleep that didn't expose them to another set of tanks appearing over the rise.

"The Weyrlings are looking very good," Chekiath commented.

Harry looked around and spotted them flying in formation below. Norendrath was supervising them, following Momnarth's instructions. Harry's impression had changed him, but it also had a profound impact on the dragons. Momnarth was the senior female who somehow fell into the role of overseeing the development of the Weyrlings and their riders. Normally she would be watching over the young dragons, but Harry asked her to come with him to Lac Logipi to check on the yearlings there and speak to the senior female about overseeing their development.

"Yes, they look very good," he replied, watching the three wings of dragons. The flying practice today was simple. They were in a standard V formation and they were practicing ways to peel apart the formation without injuring anyone. In theory, it was easy, but when flying nearly two hundred miles per hour, less than a wing length from the nearest dragon, it could be a major problem.

Harry watched as Comaloth and Hermione pulled up and out of formation neatly without disrupting anyone. He nodded in approval, watching the pair head down for a precise landing.

"Comaloth looks very good," Chekiath offered. He was becoming a little more reserved when it came to comments about females. Sometimes. Other times he was so blunt he might as well be beating Harry over his head with the girl and screaming, "Take her!".

"And I never thought Hermione would be so comfortable flying," Harry added, thinking his best friend looked downright hot with her hair streaming out behind her.

Suddenly a rider screamed. Harry's attention snapped from Hermione to the formation again and he noted that two dragons had collided. One rider was hanging on to her dragon and dangling as the dragon struggled to right itself. Several dragons trumpeted in alarm.

"Cheki!"

Chekiath vanished in a blink, then came out under Wivaronth. Harry tightened his grip on Chekiath and leaned out as far as he could, grabbing Michelle Smith by her belt. She felt the tug and let go of her hold on her dragon.

Chekiath pumped his wings powerfully and rose up under the smaller dragon, giving it enough stability to right itself, then he dropped below again, increasing the distance between the two dragons.

The sudden increase in weight caused Harry to snap downwards before his grip on his dragon could stop her falling. He groaned in pain and she screamed. They were still over a hundred feet above the ground.

"Get us down, Cheki," he said, hanging onto the girl who now dangled under him. Chekiath noted his rider's comments and dove for the ground as fast as he could without endangering the two riders hanging onto him.

To Harry and the terrified onlookers on the ground, it seemed like it took forever for Chekiath to land, but it really took less than eight seconds until he was able to carefully touch down so that Michelle could stand on her own two feet.

She stood for a second in bewilderment, then fainted. Harry would have found it funny, but he was in too much pain. He lay against Chekiath, still in the same position, one arm outstretched like he was still holding her. His one attempt to retract that arm nearly caused him to pass out.

"You're hurt!" exclaimed Chekiath, then he bellowed angrily, causing the people that were tending Michelle to realize that something was seriously wrong.

Hagrid strode over to Chekiath. "Harry?"

"Hagrid," he gasped, "can I get a hand? I think I hurt my back and shoulder."

"This is going to hurt, lad. Hang on now," Hagrid said gently, then he carefully lifted Harry off Chekiath.

Harry groaned and passed out. The last thing he remembered hearing was his dragon trumpeting in distress.

When he woke up he knew he was in the Weyr infirmary. It was dark out, so he knew he had been out for at least half a day.

"You're awake!" shouted Chekiath joyfully.

He winced and looked around in confusion.

Remus chuckled. "Give him a moment or two Chekiath," he said, then he turned back to Harry. "Hey."

He blinked and looked around, then someone placed his glasses on his face. "Hi, Remus. How are Wivaronth and Michelle?"

Remus shook his head in amusement. "Most people would be asking about their own injuries first. Not you, Weyrleader. You want to know about your rider and her dragon. I should have figured that. But to answer your question, Michelle is naturally shaken up and her dragon is upset at what nearly happened, but both are thankful that their Weyrleader acted."

Remus looked out the darkened window, not really seeing anything. "There had been some grumbling over these flying drills, but all that vanished today. All of the riders saw first hand how necessary they are. It could have been so much worse."

Harry nodded and tried to hide a wince. Remus turned his attention back at him and looked at him carefully, then he picked up a cup that was sitting on the table next to the bed. "This is a pain relief potion. It's very strong, so it'll also help you sleep."

He helped the young man drink the potion, then put the cup back on the table.

"That was quite a piece of flying you did. You went Between and came out under a dragon that was in trouble, collided with that dragon long enough to grab her rider and let her stabilize her flight. For your efforts, you earned yourself a night in the infirmary, a dislocated shoulder and a wrenched back, both of which Poppy has already seen to, thanks to Fawkes. It took all of thirty minutes to

patch you up and get you some potions, but now several of our witches are clamoring for one of them to take up healing since we don't have anyone here, except Corporal Stone and he's not a healer."

Harry nodded. "That makes sense. Do we know what happened?"

Remus nodded. "Yes. Ronan Clark on Garanoth was next after Hermione to leave formation, but he made a mistake and went left instead of right. Garanoth and Wivaronth collided briefly. Garanoth righted himself and Ronan managed to ride it out, but Michelle was thrown from her seat. She just managed to get a grip on her dragon's neck.

"With her in a panic, her dragon panicked and couldn't think well enough to straighten out her flight. You came along and managed to calm Michelle for the few seconds needed for Wivaronth to calm down and straighten out. Then you all landed."

Harry nodded and started to drift off, thanks to the pain potion he had been given.

"Sleep Harry, you'll be better tomorrow," Chekiath whispered.

"Nite Cheki," Harry mumbled to himself, then he fell asleep.

Remus nodded in satisfaction. "Sleep well, Harry. You did very well today," he murmured.

Campbeltown Weyr, Social Hall, March 22nd...

Remus left the building after explaining Harry's injuries to the riders and letting them know that he'd be up and about tomorrow. They knew he wasn't really in any danger, but they had been on eggshells all day.

The girls had rallied around Michelle, who felt responsible for Harry's injury. Ronan Clark was beating himself up because he made an honest mistake that nearly cost a rider her life.

The accident had been as big a wake up call as the disaster at Lac Logipi where dragons had been killed.

"You look confused, Hermione," May said softly.

Hermione closed the book she had been unable to read for the past four hours and looked at her friend. "I am confused," she replied. "I've been with Harry through his school years where he received a number of injuries, some even worse than what happened today. So what I don't understand is why this one seems more serious and more important to me."

May looked startled. Hermione had managed to put into words exactly what she had been feeling. A quick glance around the hall revealed a number of people who seemed to echo her feelings. Harry's injuries were minor; he'd only be in the infirmary overnight. So why was this so earth shaking?

"He is your Weyrleader, May," Trath said to all of them. "You've seen him kill to protect the Weyr, but now you see the other side. He willingly put his own life on the line to protect his riders. This is what we knew when he impressed Chekiath. It is why Chekiath will be among the biggest of dragons, because our Weyrleader has the heart of a giant. Chekiath will need to be big to carry one such as him."

May looked at Hermione, who was equally startled by Trath's announcement.

"I was slipping. My grip was failing and I knew I was going to die when he grabbed me," Michelle whispered.

Susan Bones walked over and sat next to Michelle on the couch. She smiled and placed an arm across her shoulders to comfort her. "You're safe now, and so is your dragon."

Michelle nodded and tried to suppress a shiver.

"Hmm," Mariah hummed. "Thanks to our gorgeous Weyrleader."

Several girls rolled their eyes at her. Mariah thought it was funny, but there was no mistaking the fact that a number of the girls kept hoping they'd attract Harry's eye.

"Harry has always had this thing about saving people," Hermione said softly. "He saved my life in first year. He didn't even know me at

that point and I don't think he even liked me, but he came looking for me and jumped on the back of a four meter tall Mountain Troll."

Several of the normal riders looked to May for an explanation. May had most of the books on magical beasts, as she was the one leading the effort to become a healer of dragons.

She thought for a moment, then smiled. "Think a baby King Kong with a two meter long club. Ugly as sin and a hungry meat eater."

"Mountain Trolls do not taste good," Trath offered. "Every so often they would come to my Egg Mother's weyr and eat a few of the humans. The humans tried to feed them to us, but they didn't taste good at all."

Everyone shivered at the imagery Trath provided. Trath had never eaten troll, but she shared the racial memory from her Egg Mother.

Draco watched the group. It was something he did nearly every night, but he rarely interacted with them. His upbringing made him uneasy around the muggles. He could honestly say he didn't hate them anymore, but he never knew what to say to them. He had so few things in common and no frames of reference to draw on.

On the other hand, Michelle was beautiful in his opinion. Even without magic he thought she was the prettiest girl he had ever met. Michelle and the other girls were aware of Draco's interest in her, and lumped him into the same group as Harry. Interested, but too insecure to do anything about it.

"I don't think I could have done that," he said cautiously. He looked at Michelle and his expression was deeply unhappy with what he was saying. "Harry risked himself and his dragon. Sinnath isn't as big as Chekiath or Wivaronth. I would have gotten you killed, I'm sure of it."

Draco's Sinnath was a Hebridean Black and nearly eight feet shorter than Michelle's Wivaronth, a Ukrainian Ironbelly.

"Draco, you know the only reason we didn't jump Between was because Chekiath had already beat us there," Sinnath said. "And even after Wivaronth steadied her flight, you wanted to go help the Weyrleader with Michelle."

A hush fell in the room and sympathetic eyes turned to Draco. It wasn't the first time a dragon had embarrassed their rider.

Michelle stood from the couch and walked over to where Draco sat, staring at the floor, his face flaming with embarrassment.

"Is it true? You were going to try to save us?" Michelle asked softly.

The room fell silent as everyone strained to hear his answer, while doing their best to look as though they were ignoring what was playing out in front of them.

Draco nodded and refused to meet her gaze. For the first time in his life, he felt unworthy to even talk with a girl. It was a strange feeling for the formerly arrogant pureblood that once thought he could lord it over the muggle born.

She knelt by the arm of his chair and reached out to pull his face towards hers. She gently pinned him with her gaze. "Why?" she whispered.

"Because you're that special, Harry did it because it was right. I would have done it because it was you," he whispered in reply. "I guess that's why he's Weyrleader."

She reached out and took his hand in hers, ignoring his startled look. "I need to check on Wivaronth. Would you like to come along? We can talk some more."

Draco looked at her for a moment, then he swallowed nervously and nodded. She stood and held onto his hand, pulling him from the chair.

With a brief nod to the others, Michelle led him from the room and everyone grinned. Michelle's smile was unmistakeable as they left the room. The trauma of the day would linger, but she had found a silver lining in what had been a terrible day.

"It's about time!" declared Mariah. "He's been mooning over her for weeks and she's been watching him just as intently."

"It is unusual," commented Luna. She sat off to one side, knitting. It was a pastime that Emma and Hermione had taught the girls and Luna enjoyed it greatly. It allowed her to sit and talk and just enjoy everyone's company, while still getting something useful done. A pair of socks made by Luna were treasured by everyone, since she enchanted them with a heating charm.

"Oh? Why?" asked Mariah.

Luna put her knitting down and her brow furrowed. "I'm not sure I can explain it right. Last year it would have been enough to say he's a pure blood and she's a muggle and everyone around me would nod knowingly and understand."

"This is part of that crazy class thing you wizards have going, isn't it?" asked May.

"It's more than class, May," Hermione said, then she shot an apologetic look at Luna.

"Go ahead, Hermione," Luna said. "In some ways I'm like Draco in this."

Hermione frowned, then turned back to May. "You're a sweet girl and a good friend. You're also really smart and know about things like DNA and Natural Selection. You can send an email to your friends, or watch a video on your computer. I've seen the math you've been tutoring Harry and I was surprised to learn it was far beyond anything I know."

She stopped and looked around. "We wizards came from a world where we rely on a magical form of gas lighting and still use parchment and quills to write. Draco was raised at the very pinnacle of that society and he was raised to believe that he was better than people who didn't have magic. He was raised to believe he was superior. His beliefs were as strong as your faith in God."

"Yes, I know all that, Hermione," protested May.

"You know it, but you don't understand what it really means. Draco suddenly feels like the aborigine that's walked out of the bush to discover he's standing in front of a major international airport. He feels isolated and left out, afraid to say anything for fear of looking

stupid. To make matters worse, he sees a girl that greatly interests him. We've seen him looking at her. He's not stripping off her clothes like some other boys do when they look at us. He's watching her face, her eyes. He wants to go talk to her."

"But he can't," Luna said softly. "What he fears more than looking stupid is being rejected. He knows he has very little in common with her. He doesn't understand that it's their differences that can draw them closer. He doesn't understand that by showing her magic and letting her show him her world, it can draw them together."

May looked thoughtfully at Luna, then she looked around the room noting that all of the boys had already left for the night. "I wonder if that's Harry's problem, as well," she mused aloud.

"It's a part of it," Luna said, "but not the only problem."

Hermione turned on Luna with curiosity. "How do you know what his problems are?"

Luna shrugged. "I have two eyes, Hermione. I can see as well as you can. I can't claim to know Harry half as well as you do, but I can see with my own eyes that someone really hurt him long before I ever saw him in my first year. He has a wall around him that is very much like the one I built around myself when Mum died.

"Harry is afraid of being rejected, but not for the same reasons as Draco. Harry's afraid of being hurt again. Someone hurt him and somewhere along the way he decided the best way to avoid getting hurt is to avoid getting close to anyone. He learned that to reach out caused him pain, so he avoids it entirely."

"His dragon is wearing down those walls, but it's not enough. Sooner or later one of us is going to have to step in take him by the hand," Luna replied.

She looked around. "And it is going to be one of us. He can't help but pick a rider, since that's the only kind of girl he's being exposed to. Given the Pern Weyr customs, it might even be several of us."

She shrugged. "He's a very strong man, but very brittle. The girl or girls who get involved with him will be the well from which he'll draw his resilience."

The girls sat silently for a while, thinking about Luna had said. It explained a great many things about Draco and about Harry. Unfortunately, it didn't bring any of them any closer to catching him.

"Luna, do you really think it could come down to several girls?" asked May. The very idea scandalized her.

Luna shook her head. "I'm uncertain. I don't think so for us first generation riders because we weren't brought up that way. But if you talk with Spath and Momnarth about the old time Weyrs, it was a very different story. It's very likely that as we grow in population our Weyrs may adopt a less formal relationship model."

"I'd share Mister Dark and Dreamy," Mariah said softly. That set the girls giggling and a bevy of throw pillows were hurled in her direction.

Ministry of Magic, March 23rd...

"Come!"

John Dawlish looked up to see his top five senior aurors file into the room. He frowned and leaned back in his chair.

"I don't recall calling for a meeting of our senior staff. Would someone mind telling me what's going on?" he asked testily.

"Is it true?" asked Senior Auror Davis.

"Is what true? What in the blazes are you talking about?" demanded Dawlish.

Senior Auror Shacklebolt stepped forward. In terms of seniority, he was the low man on the totem pole of those aurors present. "Sir, yesterday I lost Auror Goldmann due to the deliberate and willful spell fire cast by WDF member Austin Johnson. I filed the necessary reports and witness depositions as I should, then I excused myself from the case, as I was the murdered auror's partner for the last five years.

"Senior Auror Davis assigned four aurors to go down to the eighth floor, locate and then arrest Johnson. This morning he tells me that

no charges will be pressed and the deposition I filed has been confiscated by Senior Undersecretary Umbridge. Is this true?"

Dawlish sighed and looked sternly at his senior officers. He knew this wasn't going to go over well. "I stopped the process from continuing, Auror Shacklebolt. Officer Johnson was doing his job and what happened was a tragic accident."

"Bullshit," spat Shacklebolt. "Johnson turned and deliberately fired, hitting Jimmy in the chest. He could see we were aurors, he heard us identify ourselves as aurors and he heard our commands to stand down. He was murdered."

Dawlish stood and leaned over his desk, staring at Shacklebolt. "He was killed in a tragic accident," he said tensely.

"You're an idiot, Dawlish, and when the truth comes out I hope I'm there to see you get the Kiss, along with Fudge and the rest of his toadies," spat Shacklebolt, then he reached into his pocket and pulled out his badge. "If I can't expect the department to support me and my people in the field, then I can't work for the department. I quit."

Shacklebolt tossed his badge on Dawlish's desk and the department head stared down at it stupidly. He couldn't believe the things Shacklebolt dared to say to him! Just his comments about Fudge were enough for him to write him up and dock his pay!

Shacklebolt pushed his way through the other aurors. He had just reached for the door and was wondering how he would explain this to his wife when he heard the sound of another badge hitting the desk, then another and another.

He turned to see his friends walking towards him, all of them smiling tightly. They weren't sure exactly what they'd be doing, but Shacklebolt had summed it up precisely. One of their own was dead, murdered, and the department was refusing to do its job. They couldn't work there and look themselves in the mirror. If they stayed, all they would see is shame and cowardice.

Dawlish was in for a very bad morning as forty six of his full time Aurors resigned. The remaining four were part of Fudge's personal bodyguard and they'd follow him anywhere.

He tried to keep it quiet, but the rumors were already starting. Wizarding Britain suddenly had no police force, and the Minister was on a week's vacation in Nice. It would be at least five days before he could do anything other than sit and cower behind his desk.

Gringault, Under Gringotts in London, March 23rd...

Harry stepped into Hangar #2 dressed in his flight gear.

Hagrid looked up from where he was explaining how to deal with a sprained wing injury.

Harry smiled and motioned to Hagrid, who told the class to look at the photos he had passed around.

"Hagrid, as soon as Remus arrives, I need to borrow Hermione, May, Susan, Draco, Mariah, Luna, Martin and Mark. Those are still your best fliers, right?"

"Aye, they are." All of the riders were cleared for flying but these in particular were the most comfortable and capable at it.

"I'm sorry, Hagrid, but I need them today to present an image."

He nodded and called the riders over to join them.

Harry looked them over for a moment, then nodded. "Thanks, Hagrid. I'll take it from here. Hopefully I'll get them back to you soon."

He turned to the others. "Go get your into flight suits then meet back here in ten minutes. We're taking a trip and you people are going along to project an image."

The group scattered to their quarters and Harry rolled his shoulder, trying to ease the stiffness.

"Are you sure you're up for this, Harry? Your shoulder still hurts you," Chekiath said privately.

"It has to be done, Cheki," he replied. "This is going to be a quick meeting that will open the way to further talks. Once it's done and

over, how about we go visit Disko and we'll soak in one of the hot springs."

"I'd like that very much," Chekiath replied.

Ten minutes later they were all assembled. They were surprised to find Remus and Lord Mills had joined them.

"We're going to Gringault, the goblin capital, where I hope that we'll be able to open discussions between the Weyr and the goblins. Lord Mills is coming along as an official representative of Her Majesty's government. If all goes as well as I hope, this will be done in less than an hour and we'll be back home. When we land, you riders can dismount, but stay close to your dragon. I want to project an image here. The last time we dealt with the goblins we forced them to submit. Now I want them to look at us as possible allies," Harry said tensely.

Seeing everyone nod, he motioned to the dragons. "Let's get going then."

May and Hermione walked over to their dragons, but both watched Harry as he climbed onto Chekiath. He clearly still had problems with his shoulder as his ascent was not the usual smooth climb they had come to expect.

Both girls decided to keep close to Harry in case he needed help.

Harry sat on Chekiath's back and watched as the others fitted their hats and goggles on, then he pumped his fist twice and the thirteen dragons jumped into the air. Harry guided Chekiath into a circular flight pattern over the Weyr and waited for the others to form up behind him. He'd be providing the jump references, since the riders had never been to Gringault before.

He passed an image of the Goblin city that only Remus had ever seen. Of all of the people present, only Remus had been with Harry the day the dragons assaulted the Goblin city.

Chekiath added a command that they were to channel the cold above them instead of downwards. Harry didn't want the cold of Between causing any inadvertent damage or panic among the goblin population.

At his signal, the wing vanished from the skies and reappeared in a strange setting that shocked most of the riders.

"Follow me," Harry sent, then he nudged Chekiath, who banked sharply and started a descent into the large square below. An alarm rang and Harry grimaced, seeing a large group of Goblins forming up in front of Ragnok's palace.

Chekiath flared out and landed a good hundred paces from the Goblins. Harry waited until all of the dragons landed, then he pulled off his goggles and hat, stuffed them into his pocket, then slid down. He dropped lightly to the ground and walked forward slowly, holding his hands out.

A goblin in more ornate armor than the others stepped forward. He glared at Harry for a moment, clearly unhappy with the dragons being here.

"What do you want, Dragon Lord," spat the goblin. "We are following our agreement with you as we promised."

Harry nodded. "I know, good goblin, but I am not here about that. There is another matter, more pressing, that concerns me. If you could see your way to informing Lord Ragnok that I would wish to speak with him, either now, or at a time of his choosing in the near future, I would be most grateful. It is most urgent and it concerns the safety of your nation."

The goblin stared hard at Harry for a minute. "Wait here," he growled finally.

Harry nodded and the goblin spun on his heel and ran towards the broad staircase of the palace.

"I hope you know what you're doing, Harry," Remus murmured.

Harry turned and spotted Remus standing only a few feet away. "I have to make this offer. They can turn it down, but at least we'll have tried to reach out to them," he replied.

He glanced over at May and Hermione, who were standing nearby. Of all of the riders, only they had left their dragons to come close enough to overhear the conversation.

"Are you all right, Harry?" Hermione asked a bit timidly.

He opened his mouth and then closed it shut, the expected "I'm fine," dying before it could be born. "No," he said finally, shocking everyone. "My arm and back hurt still, but I have to do this before it's too late. Chekiath and I will be going to Disko when we're done here so I can use the hot springs, maybe ease the ache some."

Remus smiled and gently patted Harry on the back. "It's a good idea. I'm sure it will help."

Hermione looked like she wanted to say something, but at that moment the goblin returned with Ragnok following him.

"I am told you wish to speak with me?" Ragnok said in a neutral tone.

Harry bowed slightly to Ragnok first, then he spoke. "Thank you for giving me this moment of your time, Lord Ragnok. No doubt you have noticed the wizards assembling an army?"

Ragnok looked at Harry rather puzzled. He wasn't acting like a typical wizard at all! "We have noted it," he said guardedly.

"I asked myself for what reason would the wizards need an army? You create one either to defend or attack. My conclusions alarmed me and I decided that I needed to speak with you."

"You speak as if you weren't a wizard," spat Ragnok. "You carry a wand and attended their school."

Harry nodded. "I did attend their school, and once, I was a wizard. Now, I am more."

"So you claim," sneered Ragnok.

Harry straightened and looked at Ragnok coldly. "I am here, Lord Ragnok, to help your kind. If you are unable to believe that, then we shall leave you to your fate. Polenth! Come here!"

Polenth, the clan leader of the underground dragons and a number of his clan appeared in the space in front of Harry's dragons. Unlike the surface dragons, Polenth and his clan had mastered the ability to go Between while on the ground. No flying dragon could do that. The few times Chekiath had seemed to appear by his side, he had actually gone slightly airborne before jumping Between.

Harry nodded to the large jet black dragon who had the physical characteristics of a Horntail except for the stunted wings. He turned back to Ragnok who was staring warily at the massed dragons now with a touch of fear. His people remembered when the dragons had plucked them from the sky and placed them into the pens reserved for food animals.

"Will you hear me out, Ragnok? I am not here to make war or make demands upon your people. I'm here to make an offer, and to try to build trust between our peoples. If we are to work together, there must be trust," Harry said softly.

"Listen to the Weyrleader's words, mighty Goblin," Polenth urged. "Listen to the wisdom he speaks of."

Harry jerked slightly at Polenth's statement, but it was too late to do anything about it.

"What would you have of us?" Ragnok asked. "You conquered us once and we know you can do it again. So make your demands."

Harry shook his head and smiled tightly at Ragnok. "I do not make any demands, Ragnok. I am here because I fear the wizards will attack you. Unlike before, it will be a war that will bring disaster to our world. The Weyrs will stand with their friends. We are here to offer our aid, either in fighting or in helping your people evacuate to safety."

"A goblin doesn't run from a fight!" snarled Ragnok.

"Even the children?" asked Harry mildly. "Or the old and sick?"

Ragnok paused and looked around carefully, recalling that these humans arrived on the backs of dragons. "We do protect our young," he murmured thoughtfully. He turned and barked something in

Gobbledegook to another goblin, who scurried back into the palace. A moment later, a dozen goblins came running out, carrying chairs.

Ragnok waited until they were all in place before sitting down in the most ornate chair of the group. All of the others were slightly lower than his. Harry smiled to the others and motioned for them to sit, then he walked over to a chair and used his wandless magic to raise it slightly to match Ragnok's chair.

The goblin watched him with interest, then he started to chuckle. Harry didn't make his chair higher than Ragnok, he just matched heights.

"There is much here I do not understand," Ragnok admitted candidly.

Harry leaned forward in his chair and tried to ignore the stab of pain in his back. "I understand, sir, but I am here with some members of my Weyr and others in a gesture of friendship. The last time we met, I used force to drive home a point. Now I'm here offering you an opportunity for peace and friendship between your nation and mine."

Ragnok stared at Harry for a moment, he had not missed the flash of pain that crossed Potter's face, then the words sunk in. "Nation?" he repeated in surprise.

"That's right," Lord Mills said firmly. "The British government, what you would call the Muggles, recognize the dragons as an intelligent race. They may not be human, but they are sentient. We are working to recognize the dragons as a nation, just like we would do for any sentient race."

Ragnok looked at Lord Mills with surprise. Up to that point, no one had spoken but Harry.

"Lord Ragnok, may I introduce you to Lord James Mills, member of Parliament and the Prime Minister's personal envoy at this meeting. The Prime Minister is actively working to help the dragons and we have the support of the muggle Queen. While I am here so that I may offer the support and aid of my people and our dragons, Lord Mills is here to act not only as witness, but to deliver his own message from the Prime Minister," Harry said.

Ragnok looked around. "And these others?"

"Dragon riders, my lord," Harry replied. "They are bonded to their dragons such that they share a mental link between them. The dragons and their riders form a unique pair. As to the un-bonded dragons, they look to me for guidance and protection. To your left is Hermione Granger, a first born witch and rider of Comaloth, and next to her is May McNulty, normal human and Trath's rider. Each of these people, with the exception of Lord Mills and Remus Lupin, are riders, pledged to protect not just their dragons, but the race as a whole.

"Right now we are small, not even half a hundred, but someday we will fill the skies with dragons and their riders. Someday, mankind will look at these intelligent gentle giants and give thanks for their willingness to seek human companions," Harry said fervently.

"But that is someday, Dragon Lord," countered Ragnok. "Let us speak of today."

Harry bowed his head, acknowledging the point. "We offer friendship and aid, Ragnok. Should the wizards attack you, we will stand with you. If you want, we can move your people to safety, or as you have seen, we can fight."

Ragnok frowned. "When you were here last you scared a great many of our horde, but you did not kill. How can we expect you to fight when you will not kill? We have heard the tales from the reserves of wizards being driven off, but still alive."

"My rider has killed! He killed to protect our kind. He has proven fit to lead! Even now, still in pain from his injuries, he comes here on Weyr business when he should be resting," exclaimed Chekiath angrily. Several dragons rumbled menacingly and Harry held up a hand.

"Chekiath," Harry said in a pained tone. "Lord Ragnok doesn't know all of what has happened. He meant no insult."

Chekiath turned his great head to Harry, watching intently, his eyes spinning rapidly and tinged with the red of anger.

"I'm sorry, Harry," Chekiath said contritely.

Harry smiled. "It's fine, mate. We'll be done soon and you'll be able to soak in the hot springs with me."

He turned back to Ragnok, who was watching the exchange with intense interest. "As you can tell, the bonding is not one with a dominant partner. It's a bond of equals."

"But to answer your question, I have killed and I have ordered the dragons to kill. I will tell you plainly that I don't like it, but I will do whatever is necessary to protect and defend our people. We are not a warlike nation, but like the motto says, 'Draco dormiens nunquam titillandus'. Or, in English, 'Never tickle a sleeping dragon'. The wizarding world is about to learn first hand what that really means."

Ragnok nodded thoughtfully. "I can see there is much information that has escaped my notice. Your offer intrigues me, Dragon Lord. I will take it under advisement. Can I assume that Polenth can contact you?"

Harry nodded. "Any dragon in the world can contact me in an instant. Likewise, I can order any dragon to a specific location in that same instant."

Ragnok nodded, recalling how the skies of Gringault had exploded with dragons and could see the power implied in Harry's comment. He glanced around, then his eyes settled on Lord Mills and he frowned. "You said you have a message for me?"

Lord Mills nodded. "Sir, Her Majesty's government finds itself in an embarrassing position. We have been lied to so many times and we made the mistake of believing those lies, rather than verifying the information. In our defense, I will state that, until Harry showed up with the dragons, we had no idea that we were being lied to."

He paused and cleared his throat.

"Sir, the Ministry of Magic never told us about your kind, nor about dragons or any of the other sentient races we've since learned about. My Prime Minister is appalled and horrified at the problems you've had with Wizards over the years. The actions of the current Ministry of Magic are treasonous and Her Majesty's government is taking steps to deal with them."

"We are working to secure our government from their interference. When that is complete, we intend to take back the control they have wrested from us.

"In the meantime, my government wants to reach out to every sentient race on our soil. We want them to know that even if they have their own government and nation, they will all be accorded the same rights and privileges as the rest of the Crown's subjects.

"To that end, my Prime Minister is asking if you would be willing to accept an envoy on his behalf. Someone who is empowered to speak for Her Majesty's government and talk to you about bringing our two nations together in peace and perhaps trade?"

Ragnok smiled thinly, Mills had said the magic word.

Remus also grinned. He had coached James on what to say to the goblins and he had finally gotten around to saying the magic word. Trade. The goblins were all about profit.

Ragnok leaned back on his chair. There was a lot here to consider and he really wanted to talk to his own privy council before making a decision.

"There is a lot to think about here. As the Dragon Lord has pointed out, we now live under threat of war from the wizards. I see a lot of good that can come from deciding to work with both of you, but I would prefer to consult with my own advisers before making any commitments. I will contact you both as soon as I can," he said firmly, then he stood, signaling the end of the meeting.

Harry stood and bowed slightly. "Lord Ragnok, whatever your decision may be, if you find yourself needing help, tell any dragon to summon me and the Weyr will come."

Ragnok looked surprised by the offer freely given without strings attached, then he nodded.

Lord Mills stepped forward and offered his hand. "On behalf of Her Majesty's government, my lord, you have our thanks for considering our offer."

Ragnok looked at the hand for a moment, then made a decision that he knew would cause a great stir with his people. He took the hand of the human and shook it. He was the first goblin leader to ever have done so. But then he was also the first goblin to have ever been offered a human hand to shake.

Harry turned and spoke briefly with Polenth, then he turned to his dragon, who moved forward and crouched way down to ease his mounting. A look of worry passed among the riders, while Harry put on his gloves and helmet.

He pumped his fist twice and the wing sprang aloft.

Ragnok watched the dragons vanish, then he turned and walked back up the broad steps of his palace. A lot of impressions had been made that day, including one of a Dragon Lord who came to offer aid to goblins when he should have been in a sickbed.

Disko Island Weyr, March 23rd...

Chekiath banked hard, then straightened out and flared, landing neatly next to one of the fringe pools. There were a number of pools in the center of the bowl, but as they moved away from the center, they got progressively cooler.

Before now, no one had really used these pools, but Harry had Sir Robert check them out and pronounce them safe for human bathing. Even still, no one wanted to walk the distance from their Weyrs to the pools in a bathing suit when it was so cold, so most people used the bathrooms in the tents.

While Chekiath could easily soak in one of the center pools, Harry could not. The pools were just too hot, although plenty of people enjoyed the steam that rose from them. The center pools were a common place to find people sitting and enjoying the sauna like atmosphere. The dragons were very careful not to splash any human with the water from those pools, so they made an ideal place for dragons and humans to socialize.

Harry slid down off of his dragon and affectionately thumped his side. Chekiath turned his large head to look at him. "You're not mad at me, are you?" Chekiath asked. "You've been very quiet and closed off."

Harry closed his eyes and rested his head against the dragon's neck. "No, mate. I know why you said that. Hell, I would have done the same, had our roles been reversed. I'm not mad at all. I've been quiet because I've been thinking."

Chekiath nodded and then he moved towards the pool of water. He made a snuffling noise as he entered it, sinking down into the deep water until only his head broke the surface. The water rose until it was nearly overflowing the old lava tube. Harry smiled at the noises his dragon made.

"It's hard to be Weyrleader," Chekiath said. "I am your dragon and I find that hard. It's a lot worse for you. We know how hard you work. The dragons know and we appreciate your efforts. Now come, soak and let the warm water ease your pain."

Harry smiled and shook his head at his dragon's comments. The dragon was far closer to the mark than he realized. He relied on his dragon and especially the feelings of love he received continuously from the bond.

He carefully peeled out of his pants and transfigured his boxers into a pair of shorts, then he pulled his shirt off, hissing in pain as he did. Finally, he was down to just his shorts and he slid into the hot water, sighing in relief. The air temperature hovered just above freezing. The water temperature was hot but not quite hot enough to scald him.

Harry floated over to Chekiath and laid a hand on his neck. Anchoring himself, he closed his eyes and just let the waters work.

"It's funny how quiet this place is," Chekiath said. Now that the clutching dragons had returned to their Weyrs and the weyrlings were at Campbeltown, no one was at Disko. The tents were still in place and the small herd of sheep was roaming all over the island by now, but the Weyr was deserted.

Every couple of days an elf would appear and make sure the herd had several bales of hay to eat. They were free grazing but there wasn't enough vegetation on the island to support a large herd.

"Maybe someday we can make this a full time Weyr, Cheki," Harry sent. "It is a bit creepy knowing we're the only people for a hundred miles."

Chekiath rumbled with amusement and Harry opened one eye to peer at him. "What?" he asked.

"I think we're not the only people here anymore," Chekiath replied.

Harry reached for his glasses. As he slipped them on, a great many dragons appeared overhead, trumpeting their arrival. The sound echoed back and forth across the bowl and Harry couldn't help but admire the sight of so many dragons overhead in precise formation.

"We've come to join you in a soak, Weyrleader," Comaloth said. "Hermione thought you might be hungry, so we brought you some lunch, as well."

Harry pushed down a flash of irritation at Hermione. He knew she meant well. "So much for a nice quiet soak, eh, Cheki?"

"You can still soak, Harry. You can practice flirting now, if you wish," Chekiath replied.

Harry grimaced and tried to glare at his dragon, but he couldn't hold it for long. With a sigh, he settled back in the water and waited for the others.

He opened an eye again when he heard people approaching the pool he was in. It was one of eight pools rated safe for humans. He expected to see his riders; what he didn't expect was the number of girls who were wearing very tiny bikinis.

Hermione slid into the pool, blushing brightly. The bikinis had been May's idea and she had never wore one this tiny before. She should be relieved, really. Luna had wanted the girls to go skinny dipping. It was only the presence of the other boys that put a quick death to that idea. As it was, Hermione, Luna and Susan were pressed into service transfiguring bikinis for all the girls.

"I hope you don't mind us joining you, Harry?" she asked.

Harry moved a little closer to Chekiath, taking comfort from his presence in the pool. "Mind? No, not really. I guess I should have asked if others wanted to join me," he said, trying to ignore his flushed cheeks.

Chekiath rumbled merrily, then climbed out of the pool, which caused the water level to drop by a foot. Harry turned to look at his dragon. "Traitor," he muttered. He turned back and noted that when the water level dropped, several girls had their assets revealed. He flushed again and looked away quickly.

"It's good for you, Harry. Pick one, or take them all. Either way, I'm going to soak in the big pool," his dragon rumbled and walked away.

Harry turned to see five girls grinning at him and he just shook his head. "I'm going to shoot myself, I swear. Look, you know how dragons are with their advice," he said, backing away.

"Harry," May said softly, "you shouldn't be embarrassed. To be honest, we were worried about you. You didn't hide the fact that you're in pain very well at that meeting."

"And Chekiath blurting it out for everyone to hear didn't help matters," he muttered in reply.

"He's only worried about you. You're his rider so it's natural for him to be concerned, " Susan said. "I know Nimonth acts like a mother hen sometimes."

All of the girls nodded and Harry relaxed a little bit. He settled on a ledge in the water, then flinched when someone touched him with something cold. He looked up and was shocked to see Draco holding a soft drink out for him. Michelle stood nearby, also dressed in a bikini.

Harry took the drink and opened it, his eyes never leaving Draco, who positioned a cooler of drinks near the edge, then he stepped into the pool and helped Michelle enter. Michelle settled next to Draco and he put his arm around her shoulders.

He shot Hermione a questioning look and she smiled slightly, then nodded. Surprised, he turned back to the couple. Draco smirked at him, he could tell what was going through his mind.

"Michelle, you and Wivaronth all right?" Harry asked.

"Thanks to you we are," she answered with a bright smile.

"Potter, thanks," Draco said softly. He looked very uncomfortable, despite the nearly naked girl cuddling into his side.

Harry understood immediately what Draco was saying and feeling. "I'm just glad no one was hurt," he replied.

"Harry," Hermione and May both said at the same time. Their tone was identical and both were gently chiding him.

He looked at the two in surprise, and with his attention drawn to those two girls, another moved in. "Someone was hurt," Luna said, shaking her head. "I don't know why you try to make your own injuries appear insignificant, but you were hurt."

She waved her wand in his direction and he flinched until the pale blue light hit his shoulder. It felt cool against his heated skin and the muscles relaxed instantly.

He closed his eyes and breathed a sigh of relief. "Thank you," he whispered.

Luna smiled brightly. "You're welcome. I can't let you run around hurting. You won't be any use in our Snorkack expeditions if you can't fly," she replied, then she winked at the others who had started laughing.

Harry stared at her and wondered if she was kidding.

Harry's Weyr, later that evening...

Harry looked up from his book when he heard a knock on the door. He made a gesture and the small stereo that James had insisted he take fell silent. He rolled his sore shoulder and waited. The hot springs had helped for a while, but it was aching badly again.

"Come!" he called.

The door opened and Ronan Clark entered the room. He was Garanorth's rider, the one who'd clipped Michelle and Wivaronth resulting in Harry's injury.

"Ronan," Harry said in surprise. "What can I do for you?"

The tall, sandy haired young man entered the room and looked rather uncomfortable. "Weyrleader," he said nervously, "about the other day."

Harry raised his hand, stopping him. "Did you deliberately fly to hit Wivaronth?"

"No! I swear," exclaimed Ronan.

Harry nodded. "I know. You made a mistake. That's all it was, Ronan, an accident. Could it have been avoided? Yes, but that's why we run the flight drills. So that you know what to do and do them."

"But, Weyrleader," protested Ronan.

"Please, just call me Harry. It's not like I asked for this job," Harry said with a touch of annoyance.

When Ronan nodded, Harry motioned him to a chair. "Ronan, we're not the Army, even if the army is helping us. The only reason we fly those drills is that so you will become a better rider."

Ronan shook his head ruefully. "You always seem so collected. There are days I feel so out of place here," he said.

Harry shook his head and chuckled. "Hardly. I wanted to scream bloody murder after Michelle let go of her dragon. I was hoping to boost her back into her seat, but she let go as soon as I had a grip on her. As much as I wanted to yell at her, I was too busy passing out to be bothered."

Ronan shot him a grin. "Not her smartest move, eh?"

Harry returned his grin. "No, but she was afraid and people do funny things when they're afraid."

"I'm older than you and I was terrified watching you hold Michelle as you landed. I felt sure I had killed you both," Ronan admitted.

Harry shrugged. "It was just something that had to be done. I was terrified the whole time that I was going to fall from my seat," he admitted. "It seemed like it took forever to land and I know Chekiath landed a lot faster than was safe."

Ronan nodded, then looked hesitant. "I meant to ask you, would you mind much if on the weekends I can indulge in my hobby?"

Harry looked up with interest. He never had any sort of hobby before. "What kind of hobby?"

"Radio controlled airplanes. We have these wonderful runways..."

Harry nodded, thinking it over. "Check with Captain Atkins to make sure you won't mess with her radios. I don't have a problem with it, though."

Ronan smiled and stood. "Thanks, Harry," he said, then he turned for the door.

At the door he stopped and turned to Harry again. "I'll let you know when I have the planes. I have to write my dad and have him send them. You could come out and check them out. They're great fun."

Harry nodded, interested in Ronan's planes. The idea of a hobby intrigued him.

It was suggested at one point by Queen Elizabeth that the dragons might be capable of providing scales in lieu of heartstrings and blood donations to help offset their loss to the wizarding world. The Weyrleader laughed and rejected the idea outright. The Prime Minister employed a bit more tact by asking the Queen if her family would have donated blood to Nazi Germany in 1940. Needless to say, it was the last time the subject ever came up.

Excerpted from *The Weyrs of Earth* by Remus John Lupin, published 2040.

Author's notes and Mockeries:

- Money. This has come up several times so let's put it to bed now shall we? Harry is not rich in this story. He doesn't have millions of galleons in the bank, he had twenty thousand in his school trust and there's a vault with maybe fifty to seventy thousand more. The family vault also contains really cool stuff salvaged from Godric's Hallow, like dishes, sheets and two complete sets of obsolete Hogwarts textbooks.

There won't be a secret inheritance containing nuclear powered combat suits and surface to air missiles, he won't discover a stave that will grant him the abilities of Mega Merlin on Steroids! (Look it up it was a very popular television cartoon on Ukrainian Television during the 1960s).

So many fan fictions load Harry up with all sorts of super powers. Well that isn't happening here. Harry is VERY powerful magically and untrained totally. And he's not going to be interested in getting that kind of training. He has a dragon and all of the dragons listen to him. Why do we need animagus forms, super charged staves and vaults full of rare spells that can move the Earth from orbit?

- We really appreciate people struggling to leave reviews from their portable devices like iPhones, iPads and iDildos but seriously, if you're going to leave a review, do so, just make sure it makes sense?

- BJH, no Sirius is not going to take Harry out to some bar and get him a hooker.

- I know I've said this before and I guess it bears repeating. What is Between? It will be addressed in this story eventually. But it is not a vacuum like space and its not at absolute zero.

- Shaggy37, the dragons will not become part of any formal military machine. Harry wants to secure his dragon's future, not kill them off in a war if he can avoid it.

- Jamr left a review of "very good write faster". Here is the official Bob and Alyx response approved by our legal department. "NO". The original response which wasn't approved by legal involved some disgusting bodily functions and some dead fish.

- Several readers asked about the meeting with the Queen. It will happen, you just haven't seen that chapter yet. I have seen it, so I know its going to happen.

- Homicidal Roommate you don't scare us! Alyx has weapons that will make you scream for mommy and clutch at your testicles in fear. I know, she uses them on me all the time. Do you have any idea how hard it is to type this stuff up while holding one's testicles protectively?

- Romulus Lupin, we've been told out Multiverse and Sphere of Influence stories are the closest thing to one giant disclaimer. If you haven't checked them out, I suggest you do so.

- We've been asked how big this story is in terms of chapters. Seriously? I can't answer that. I am currently working on chapter 17 and the end isn't in sight. Part of the problem is that end keeps moving. It is possible that this tale will continue on for quite a while, because there are that many problems to solve. It is equally possible that this story will end at some mid point and a new tale will be started, picking up the story line from the last end point. I haven't decided yet. I know this isn't what people want to know, but the scope of this story is a lot bigger and more complex than I originally envisioned. Sorry. If that really upsets you, I could utter those magic words right now of "The End". But I won't... yet. Especially if you send me donuts.

Standard Disclaimer:

The curtain pulled back and Bob stopped and stared. Against the back wall was the biggest monitor he had ever seen. It was bigger than enormous, it was bigger than ginormous, it was plaidnormous!

Bob turned to look at Alyx. "Did you buy that?" he asked.

"Yes, I got it on sale, we'll have to give up on a few luxuries, but I thought it was a good investment," she replied smugly.

"Give up on a few? Give up what?"

Alyx looked up from connecting the screen to her computer. "Oh little things, like eating, your internet connection, your subscription to LOTRO, your subscription to playboy, your subscription to Backyard Nuclear Physics, that sort of thing. I think that covers it, but I did manage to save enough so that I could continue to play WOW and have the internet on my computer," she replied smugly.

Bob frowned. "Did you remember to factor in the power bill?"

Alyx blanched. "Oh oopsie."

Bob snickered. "You think that's bad, wait til the readers discover you've put us out of the writing business."

Alyx glared at him. "No, I took that into account. Here!"

She shoved a small yellow object at him. Bob took it and looked down at the object in his hands. "You wrote the disclaimer out on post it notes?" he exclaimed.

"Yup, you'll be able to visit each reader and give them a personalized disclaimer for them to post to their monitor. They will know we don't own Harry Potter or the Dragon Riders of Pern!" she exclaimed dramatically.

Bob stared at her in shock.

"And while you're gone, delivering the disclaimer, I'll be raiding Thunder Bluff on my new monitor." she declared.

Bob shook his head and walked off the stage. "I'll be back in about eight years, there are thousands of disclaimers to deliver."

Alyx clapped her hands and fired up her computer. The monitor flared to life, then the entire stage went dark. Alyx whimpered, she was sure the power company had cut the lines and burned all records of their account.

"Bob?" Alyx whispered in the dark. Something nearby growled ominously and she squeaked.

Bob looked up from the master circuit breaker and grinned. "Enjoy the chapter folks. No raiding for Alyx with that crap gear. Now who's first on the delivery list?"

Dragons have wings and, therefore, the ability to fly. Inbreeding and long disuse, however, has caused that ability to erode to the point where most dragons in the reserves are unable to leave via flight. Superior wizarding wards restrain them from escaping. By now, the dragons, while still dangerous, are like the domesticated bull: dangerous but controllable.

Excerpt from *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find them* by Newt Scamander. Published 1927.

Office of the Undersecretary to the Minister of Magic, March 24th...

The door flung open and Lucius Malfoy stormed into the room. "What in the name of Hecate have you done, you stupid woman!" he thundered. He was beyond incensed. The bitch was clearly overstepping her bounds and he'd put her in her place!

Delores Umbridge looked up from the parchment she was reading. "I beg your pardon?" she said icily. She was relieved to see four of her people move quietly into the office behind Malfoy. She knew he was a dangerous wizard and far more capable with a wand than she was. But she wasn't alone. She had friends working for her.

"You gutted the DMLE! Now who's going to find my son?" Malfoy asked angrily.

She slowly stood and glared back at him. "Your son? Your son probably got one of those missing girls pregnant and ran off with her.

In fact, according to Marcus Flint, your son was considered a real ladies man, often sampling the girls of Hogwarts." She sneered. "Cassius Flint says that his son saw your boy being quite chummy with that mudblood, Granger."

It was a nasty dig that she knew wasn't true, but it would set him off.

"He would never!" Lucius declared. He leaned over her desk, getting right into her face. "When Cornelius hears what you've done he'll send you to Azkaban personally. You've gone too far, bitch, and I'm going to take you down once and for all. I thought it was amusing to let you murder Bones, but you're not powerful enough to take me."

"Imperio!" said a soft voice from behind him.

He shook and a feeling of lazy peacefulness descended upon him. It was a feeling he had never felt before in his life.

Umbridge smirked at him. "Tut, tut, Lucius. You know you can't fight it. Why, you weren't able to fight it the first time it was used on you. Why try now?"

He struggled against the voice commanding him to put down the cane with his wand in it. His eyes bulged bug like and sweat dotted his forehead. Slowly, his cane came to rest on the desk.

Delores reached for it, carefully avoiding the small poisoned needle that would extend if one was foolish enough to try to draw the wand without first twisting the hilt of the cane. Sometimes it paid to be the daughter of the craftsman who made such fine wand holders.

She admired the solid silver snake-like wand grip, then she looked over his shoulder. "Is it clear out there?"

"It will be when we dispose of his body," came an answer. Several men chuckled and she smiled sweetly at them, then she turned back to Lucius.

"It's such a shame, Lucius. I could have used you on my side, but you are far too interested in being the one in control. I'm afraid I can't have that. Control is not something I willingly share with anyone."

She threw the wand and cane on the desk, then pulled parchment from one of the drawers. "You will sign this, Lucius. In exchange, I will allow your wife to continue living. I'll even leave your brat and his little pregnant whore alone when I find them. And believe me, I will find them."

Delores giggled like a school girl. "Oh, yes, I'll find them all and spread their entrails from one end of Britain to the other!"

He stared at her and she gestured.

"IMPERIO!" said the voice from behind him.

"Sign the parchment, Lucius! Put your mark and your seal on it now!" she hissed.

He looked down at the desk and picked up the black blood quill and signed the parchment. Dropping the quill, he pressed his signet ring into the parchment.

"Excellent," she crooned. "That wasn't all that difficult now was it?"

She gestured again and two of the men stepped forward and threw an invisibility cloak over him before dragging him from the room.

She handed the parchment to one of the others. "You know what to do with this."

"Yes, my Lady," he said, taking the parchment. He turned and hurried from the room.

The goblins wouldn't question the parchment. They knew Lucius never did things that didn't provide him a gain somewhere, so emptying his accounts into the Ministry's coffers had to be politically motivated.

They would be right, only it wouldn't be Lucius gaining power. Delores was systematically undermining the structures of authority in the hopes that she would become the power behind Cornelius.

Campbeltown Weyr, March 24th...

Remus looked up from the old manual typewriter he was banging on. Given his condition, he had often been forced to seek employment in the muggle world and typing was just one of the skills he had been forced to learn to survive.

"Remus, my boy, can I come in?" Albus said from the door.

Remus waved him in and motioned to a chair. "Give me a moment to finish this paragraph and then I'll be right with you, Albus."

He typed for another minute, then he pushed the machine to one side and looked at Albus.

The old man eyed the machine and gestured to a page Remus was already done with. "May I?" he asked.

Remus chuckled and passed the sheet over.

Albus examined it carefully. "Wonderful machine," he murmured. "Every letter is uniform and the spacing is so precise. Our best printers can't duplicate this," he said, then he passed the page back to Remus.

"You're right, Albus. However, our best printers are using techniques that are two centuries old," he said, then he waved a hand at the old manual typewriter that Lily had bought him after they graduated. It was one of his prize possessions. "This machine is an antique. Harry's Mum bought it for me when I had trouble getting work. She said I'd be able to find work in the muggle world if I knew how to type. As it stands, it's old fashioned and doesn't have half the abilities of the modern machines. I could ask James to buy me a modern machine, but I don't want to give this up."

Albus eyed the machine sadly and reflected on how such impersonal things could bring back fond memories of people lost.

"Now, Albus, why don't you tell me what brings you to my office this morning?" Remus said.

Albus shook himself and turned back to Remus. "I have received some disturbing news from Minerva, along with an even more alarming letter from an old friend. Things in our world are turning bad very, very quickly.

"Minerva writes that my old friend, Garrick Ollivander, had a run in with our stalwart defenders, causing him to pack up his shop and flee. Florean Fortescue wasn't as lucky. Minerva visited him in St. Mungo's and says he'll be there for weeks still. Both men refused to allow a recruiting poster to be placed in their shops.

"As it stands, Florean still got off lucky. Auror James Goldmann and his partner tried to intervene in the fight between Ollivander and the WDF men. Auror Goldmann was killed in the exchange. Minerva heard from his partner, Auror Shackbolt, who told her that almost all of the auror force has resigned because the head of the department is refusing to arrest the WDF men responsible for the crime.

"No one knows where Ollivander fled to, but he took his shop with him."

Albus paused and peered over his glasses at Remus. There was no customary twinkle in his eyes. "Right now the Wizarding World has no police force and the WDF is slowly assuming control. I do fear that if this isn't stopped, Cornelius Fudge may find himself as a figurehead, while Delores Umbridge runs everything from behind the scenes."

Remus glanced out the window where he could see the dragons and their riders assembling for morning flight drills. They normally ran drills in the morning and a few classes on basic dragon care, then used the afternoons to study various subjects. For the muggle subjects, tutors were slowly coming available from the British armed services, usually retirees or wives of retirees that had spent their careers teaching at base schools.

He turned back to Albus. "It's bad news to be sure Albus, but I'm not sure we can do anything about it. As Harry is so quick to point out, we have thirty four total riders and a few non-bonded people who can ride dragonback. And only twelve of those riders are magical."

Albus nodded unhappily, but he had expected this kind of answer. There just weren't enough riders to do much unless they brought in the un-bonded dragons.

"And the other piece of news?" prompted Remus.

Albus looked rather unhappy at this point. "My friend, Alejandro Croaker, sent me a letter via Minerva. He is the wizard in charge of Department of Mysteries. He claims that all the wizards who have rejected our world have vanished, and that I or Harry Potter seem to know where they are and have some measure of control over them. He wants me to tell these wizards to contact him.

"Apparently part of his charter is to occasionally arrange for a change of government when the existing government is in danger of exposing our world. His department is too small to have any impact on the Ministry and he wanted to use those wizards who have gone back to the muggle world to help him."

Remus chuckled and shook his head. "I'm afraid he's in for a disappointment then," he said, then took a deep breath. "My suggestion is a simple one. Pass the information on to James and let him inform the appropriate individuals. You have taken it upon yourself to tutor our magical riders in their magics and should probably stick to that. The problems of the Wizarding world have grown beyond just dragons versus wizards and it's out of our hands."

Albus looked unhappy with the answer. Remus noted the man's expression. "Albus, what can we do? We have dragons and not nearly enough riders. Harry's concentrating solely on dragons and anything that affects them. I'm certain he wouldn't have gone to the goblins except for the underground dragons there. In a few years time, I'm sure the Weyr will be a force to reckon with, but we aren't today."

Albus held up a hand placatingly. "I know, my boy, I know. I guess I have grown accustomed to being at the center of things."

"But you are, Albus. You are at the center of the biggest thing to hit the human race since the invention of the wheel. I'll grant you your position has changed radically, but we're doing something that has never been done before," Remus said firmly. "I can't begin to tell you how much I envy Harry and the other riders. What they are doing is unique in human history."

Albus nodded. "I can see why you say so, but I can't help but worry about our world. All this upheaval in our Ministry leaves us

vulnerable to Voldemort taking advantage of it. Who knows what he's..." He broke off and frowned when Remus began to laugh. "I fail to see any humor in this. Voldemort is a terrible threat to everyone."

"Yes, about that," Remus said a bit uncomfortably. "A month before James and Lily went into hiding, James told Sirius about the prophecy. When Sirius escaped and I realized he was innocent, he and I spoke a lot about that time. Part of what we spoke about included the Prophecy."

"I know you're not going to approve of this part, but the dragons recognized the spirit that came out of Harry as something very dangerous. They were able to detect other entities similar in nature and they led us to a small town called Little Hangleton."

Dumbledore jerked as if shocked and he leaned forward staring at Remus intently. "And?" he pressed.

Remus shifted nervously. "Well, you see, once we knew that we were up against Voldemort in a spirit form, we decided to put an end to the threat once and for all. We, that is, Sirius, myself and a dozen or so dragons, stormed the place. We captured Voldemort in some sort of magical homunculus. Sirius recognized it. He also knew he couldn't just kill the thing. So he tore his family library apart looking for books that contained information on very specific dark spells."

"Albus, he locked Voldemort's spirit into that form, then altered it so it was more animal like than human. He cursed the spirit such that if it ever left that form it would be banished to one of the demon realms. Finally, he boxed it up and left it in the Director's office at the London Zoo. It's stuck, with no means of escape. The dragons found him and helped contain him. Sirius cursed him to an immortal existence without any magic or any ability to communicate."

"I never saw him like this before. He came back to the weyr after getting rid of that murderer and got drunk. Not surprising, given that we're talking about Sirius. But I'd never seen him that drunk before. When he sobered up, he had me obliviate him so he wouldn't remember the spells he used."

Albus looked at the man in surprise, then he shook his head. It was an interesting solution and he had to admit, it was one that worked.

He was also comforted by the idea that Sirius had most of the information removed from his mind. Vanquish doesn't necessarily mean kill, he thought. The dragons provided the ability, through Harry. And so the prophecy ends not with a cataclysmic war, but with a whimper of a Dark Lord turned muggle science experiment.

"Does Harry know?"

"Only in broad terms. We didn't think he needed to know. His dragons helped locate him, destroyed that big snake of his and let us capture Wormtail. I think Harry's done his fair share, don't you?"

Albus nodded with a growing smile. "Indeed. You have given me much to think about today, Remus, and you have relieved an old man of his biggest fear."

He stood then and looked at the younger. "I will pass the information to James. I daresay he will make use of it. In the meantime, I have a class later this afternoon and I'd best prepare for it."

Campbeltown Weyr, March 24th...

He dropped lightly to his feet and immediately crouched down. He had spent nearly four days watching this place and he was certain this was what he was looking for. From his vantage point he could see armed sentries making their rounds at the gates, trying to stay warm in the cold of the evening.

A pair of headlights approached from another direction and he tensed. He watched the military vehicle come within fifty yards of his position, but it never slowed down. He was uneasy. There was a lot more magic going on around him than he had expected there to be.

This was supposed to be an airfield run by the Ministry of Defense and the military presence confirmed it was still very active. But in four days of observing, he only seen two military aircraft, and one of those didn't belong to the British!

Something smelled wrong and his finely honed instincts were screaming that this place may hold information he could use.

He wrapped his invisibility cloak tighter around himself and started to carefully move towards a cluster of buildings that had a lot of traffic coming and going all day long.

He sprinted across the road, keeping low. On the other side, he knelt behind some bushes, trying to get a better understanding of what this place was all about.

He froze suddenly as the hair at the back of his neck rose up. A low growl sounded from just over his shoulder and he could feel the hot breath pushing against him.

"Stand slowly and drop the cloak and your wand. If you make so much as a single move that I don't tell you to make, the dragon will fry you," said a voice. "Cheki, call in Norendrath, Spath and Momnarth. Alert the Weyr."

He dropped his cloak and wand. He wasn't too worried though, as he had a spare wand and several other weapons. If he had to he'd fight his way out of this.

Lights suddenly turned on, flooding the area around the buildings and a siren went off in the distance. One of the hangars opened its doors and several dragons came loping out of the building with people chasing after them. Spath and Norendrath landed about a dozen yards away. Norendrath had Sirius on his back. Sirius saw Harry holding a man at wand point, heard Chekiath growling and he immediately slid down from his friend's back.

The man's eyes bulged outwards at Sirius' approach. He recognized Sirius and he immediately exploded into action. Here was Voldemort's number two man at a muggle military installation! He had to do something! He pulled his backup wand and immediately cast a bone crushing hex, which hit Sirius in the chest.

Harry yelled in outrage and he thrust his hand forward. The man's wand glowed blindingly white, then exploded, taking most of the man's arm with it. Harry had found a use for his ability to access a wand remotely by overloading the core in the wand the man carried.

Chekiath stomped forward and swiped at his legs with one huge paw. The man screamed and fell to the ground with both legs badly

broken. Growling louder, Cheki placed a huge clawed paw on top of the man.

Panicked, in pain, the man tried to activate his emergency portkey, but the Weyr was under an anti-apparation, anti-portkey wards. His last sight before unconsciousness claimed him was a dragon standing over him, baring his teeth.

Harry sprinted to where Sirius lay and knelt on the cold ground. "Sirius?" he whispered. He reached out, but was afraid to touch the man. Sirius groaned and shifted slightly and Harry nearly wept in relief.

A second later, Remus and Katherine Atkins ran up to Harry. Atkins gasped and fumbled for her walkie talkie.

"Remus, do something," Harry pleaded, his eyes overflowing with tears now.

Sirius opened his eyes for a moment and he smiled at Harry before closing them again.

Remus stood and conjured a stretcher, then carefully levitated Sirius onto it. After casting a few sticking charms, he gave a quick flick of his wand, then turned and bolted for the infirmary, the stretcher following him.

Katherine watched Remus for a moment, then she turned her attention back to the intruder. He was unconscious and her people were working on him. Someone had applied a tourniquet to his arm and they were waiting for the ambulance to pull up so they could get him to the infirmary.

Dan Granger ran up to the scene and Atkins jerked a thumb towards Harry, who still knelt on the ground where Sirius had lain. Chekiath stood nearby crooning softly, but Harry wasn't paying any attention.

"Harry," Dan said gently.

Harry didn't look up. Dan walked over to where he knelt and placed his hands under Harry's arms and pulled him to his feet. "Let's get you inside where it's warm."

"He killed Sirius," Harry said flatly, turning his gaze towards the injured man.

"You don't know that," Katherine said. "He was still breathing when Remus took him away and I have no doubt that your Madam Pomfrey is probably already working on him."

"Come on, Harry," Dan repeated, "Let's go find out what's happening."

He wiped at his eyes and reluctantly nodded. He was terrified and wasn't sure he wanted to know Sirius' condition. He was afraid that Sirius would be dead. If he died, not only would he lose his godfather, but one of the last links to his parents.

Dan led him into the infirmary and they both stopped when they saw Madam Pomfrey working on Sirius, her wand flashing constantly. Remus stood motionless not far from the pair. Corporal Stone, the company medic, helped Madam Pomfrey by fetching potion bottles from her bag.

The door opened and Katherine held it open while two of her security team moved the assailant in and placed him on another bed. Poppy glanced up at him, noting the obviously broken legs and the missing arm. She gestured and Corporal Stone left her to go work on him.

Harry growled in the back of his throat and he reached for his wand. Only Remus stepping in front of him prevented Harry from blasting the man to pieces.

"Get out of my way, Remus," Harry said intently.

"No and I won't let you do it, Harry. Think! We need to find out who he is and how he found us."

"I'm not going to say it a second time. Get out of my way," Harry repeated.

Katherine turned to see Harry staring down Remus, his wand sparking with power. The room was rumbling and she could hear dragons outside bellowing. She stepped between the two men and grabbed Harry by the shoulders.

"This isn't helping Sirius. Killing him might make you feel a little better for a moment or two, but it won't tell us who sent him here and why. If you kill him now, we may still have a major problem for the Weyr and we won't know who is behind it."

He slowly focused on her, his eyes empty, his face expressionless.

"I promise you, if Sirius doesn't pull through, I'll personally hold him down for you," she said intently.

He searched her face for a moment, then he nodded.

She gently turned him around and passed him over to Dan. "Why don't you two go get a cup of coffee or something. I'll send word as soon as we know anything."

Dan wrapped an arm around Harry's shoulders. "Come on, Harry," he said gently.

Harry let himself be led outside where Chekiath waited. Norendrath waited also, right next to the door to the infirmary. He stopped and looked at the dragons. "We should know soon," he said to Sirius' dragon friend.

"I have increased our dragons overhead, Weyrleader," Norendrath said. "Instead of five, twenty now watch the Weyr and our skies."

Harry nodded and reached out to Chekiath. He patted his dragon absently and started walking to the kitchen hall. It had been sheer chance that Chekiath had spotted the man as they returned to the Weyr after bringing James home.

For more than an hour he sat with Dan, holding a cup of coffee, but not drinking. Hermione, May and many other riders joined them in the hall, sitting and waiting, talking quietly among themselves.

When Remus appeared in the doorway and looked around, Harry's eyes snapped to his. When he saw Remus smile softly, he sagged in his seat as the tension drained away. Hermione and May both grabbed him by his arms to keep him upright.

Remus walked over and sat down next to Dan, across the table from Harry. "It was close. That curse shattered his rib cage and punctured his lungs in multiple places. But Madam Pomfrey is a master healer. When I left she was working on our guest. I don't recognize him, but judging by his equipment, I am going to guess he works for the Ministry."

He paused and poured himself a cup of coffee. "It's strange. If he's Ministry, why was he here alone? Even the hit wizards usually work as a team of three or four to a group."

Harry looked up at Remus in surprise, then he turned slightly and his eyes glazed over. "Norendrath, there may be more intruders in the Weyr. Be extra careful. I don't know if Wolf told you, but Smelly Dog is going to live."

There was a moment of silence, then Harry got an impression of more dragons taking to the air. "If there are more intruders, we will find them, Weyrleader. And thank you. Wolf was so worried about you, he ran right by me."

He shook his head and turned back to Remus. "Sorry, Norendrath was increasing our coverage overhead. If there are more intruders, we'll find them. Extra dragons are also watching the sleeping quarters for the riders." He took a deep breath. "Remus," he said slowly, "About what happened in the infirmary. I'm sorry."

"Harry, don't." Remus replied. "If Sirius had died I would have gladly skinned him alive. Believe me when I say that I understand what you were feeling."

Albus appeared in the doorway and he looked around for a moment before spotting Remus. He walked over and sat down. "Madam Pomfrey will be returning to the school shortly. She wanted to send her patients to St. Mungo's but realizes that isn't possible."

"Our assailant had a portkey that ends somewhere in the vicinity of the Ministry of Magic, but without testing it, I cannot be more precise. On the surface, all of the items he carried looked like Ministry issue, but appearances are misleading. His wands are not Ministry standard wands. Nor was his invisibility cloak or the little potion kit he carried. It could be that he decided to replace his Ministry supplied items with more reliable, custom items or his kit was

carefully crafted to give us the impression that he works for the Ministry. Until he wakes up and we get him talking, it's impossible to tell."

"Do you recognize him, Albus?" asked Remus.

Dumbledore shook his head. "No, I'm afraid I do not. That should come as no surprise, however. Some departments, like the Department of Mysteries, have taken great steps to make their employees unrecognizable. Or perhaps he could be an employee hired from elsewhere. Senior Auror Kingsley Shacklebolt, for example, was born and taught in South Africa."

"Can we get some veritaserum?" asked Harry.

Albus blinked and peered at him intently. "I can brew, it assuming we can get the ingredients, but are you sure that is the way you want to go, Harry? You cannot just force him to take it. No court would recognize such a confession."

Harry stood and stared down at the man. "My godfather was nearly killed and my Weyr invaded, perhaps by an agent of the Ministry of Magic. The man cast a lethal spell without consideration or regard to who he was casting it on. He will be interrogated under veritaserum or I'll have Cheki light a fire in his flesh until he talks. One way or the other, I will have answers from this man. Frankly, veritaserum is a lot cleaner than slowly roasting him via dragon fire."

He turned and walked from the room, leaving everyone in stunned silence.

"Albus," Emma said, "I know you're concerned with legalities here, but it's too soon for that. Right now his only concern is Sirius and why this happened. He wants to know if his dragons and his riders are safe and I can't blame him. He doesn't give a damn about court legalities."

"I understand, Emma, but he needs to learn that a leader, above all others, must be bound by the law," Albus countered.

"Perhaps that is true. But he is the Weyrleader. He is a leader of a nation that has no laws at the moment. I'm certain Harry doesn't

even consider himself British any longer," May added to the conversation.

Hermione nodded. "She's right. If nothing else, right now he's forming the basis for the laws that will govern the Weyrs. You've seen what he is willing to do to protect his Weyr; to protect us. Can't you see that forcing this man to take veritaserum is a compromise he's offering? If you don't take it, I'm certain his next step will be to make the man talk by dragon fire."

Dan looked at his daughter strangely. "You don't seem very upset that he would be willing to torture someone."

Hermione turned to her father. "Daddy, what would you do if you caught someone trying to rape me?"

He stared at her for a moment. "I think I would probably kill the bastard," he admitted ruefully.

She nodded and reached out to take his hand. "Harry feels the same way about all of us. He's committed to giving us the best life he can. I do not think I could easily fill his shoes, and yet I know I could easily cast a lethal curse at someone hurting my Comaloth."

"And I would kill anyone who even attempted to harm you," Comaloth said fiercely. "You are my rider and I am your dragon. We are together and the only time I will share you is with your children and the people you mate with."

Emma chuckled and shook her head at Hermione's reaction to her dragon's comment.

"It would be easier if you and May just shared Harry," Trath added.

Both girls groaned.

"Trath!" hissed May, then she buried her face in her hands.

"What? You could go to him now if you want. I'm sure he would appreciate it. Chekiath is very unhappy right now and his rider is still very upset. Harry loves Smelly Dog very much, even if he doesn't know how to say so. He is frightened because he nearly lost Smelly Dog and because he was angry enough to kill."

Both girls were up and moving before Trath had even finished her statement and the adults stared at the retreating girls in astonishment. The other riders followed close behind them.

"Did you see that?" exclaimed Dan.

Emma shook her head. "Both of them?"

Remus chuckled. "No, and certainly not in the way you're thinking. I'm not going to pry but I would bet any amount of money that Harry's quarters will be overflowing with Riders tonight. Maybe not all of them, but a good many of them. He is their Weyrleader, but he's also their friend. I'd bet we're going to see a repeat of what happened for Susan, only with more people."

Emma nodded, remembering. When Susan lost her Aunt, a number of riders rallied around her and helped her through her grief. No one had even impressed at that point, but they were still tied together by an unspoken bond. Now they were united and joined by an unbreakable bond of dragons. One of their own was hurting and they'd reach out to him.

Not far away, some twenty people crowded into Harry's quarters. He was initially surprised and shocked, but started relaxing after a bit. Luna handed him a cup with whispered advice to sip it, not gulp it down. It took a bit, but slowly the icy knot in his belly dissolved and he relaxed.

They talked long into the night, helped along by Luna's special brew, which turned out to be one part pepper up potion and four parts orange juice and vodka.

Andrews Air force Base, Maryland, USA, March 25th...

The Secretary of Magic, Christian Baker, frowned and stepped into the darkened hangar. He had received an emergency signal from the office of the President citing a need to meet with him on an urgent matter of national security.

Baker was annoyed that he was forced to interrupt his busy schedule to meet with this muggle, but he was bound by his oath. There were very few controls on the Department of Magic, but the

oath of office imposed several personal compulsions on the Secretary that he couldn't shirk. Anything involving national security could not be shrugged off. However annoyed he was by the summons, he couldn't avoid attending the meeting.

He smirked. No matter what the topic, he was sure the meeting would be short. A single gesture from him and his personal guard would obliterate the man, leaving him with a memory of a very productive meeting, even if nothing happened.

His guard, four men in invisibility cloaks, followed him into the room and spread out. The hangar was poorly lit with only a few of the large overhead halogen lamps lighting it. Long shadows and large dark areas filled the room, adding for an uneasy atmosphere.

Baker was walking into a trap, but was too arrogant to think mere muggles could ever get a drop on him.

He stood in the largest center of light in the large room and looked at his watch. The President was supposed to be waiting for him to show up! Four loud shots rang out and echoed in the hangar and Baker whirled around to see two of his men crumple to the ground, their invisibility cloaks sliding from their bodies. From another two locations pools of blood appeared but no bodies were visible.

Unlike the British, who shot to disable the President's minders, the US Marine sharpshooters were under no such restrictions. And while invisibility cloaks worked fine in most cases, they didn't conceal their wearer's signature from the infrared scopes mounted on their rifles.

Baker whirled in place and doubled over in pain as a spasm hit him. Someone had raised an anti-apparition ward! A door opened and ten armed marines ran into the hangar, shouting at him to disarm. He was reaching for his wand and his portkey when his arms and legs locked up, causing him to topple over.

In shock and fear he watched another wizard appear. The wizard carefully folded up his invisibility cloak and placed it into a small bag.

"Captain," he said with a thick British accent, "this isn't a case of a man with a gun. Even without a wand, many wizards have some

capabilities with magic. So put them down and take away everything they have. Keys, money, even buttons can be turned into a portkey."

The young officer nodded. "Even clothing?"

"Even clothing," agreed the British agent.

"Full body cavity search then," muttered the captain.

"Quite so," the British agent said, then he turned to look at the Secretary of Magic. "The President will be here shortly. I strongly suggest you rethink your position. Right now, it's not looking good."

He waited until the marines had removed everything from the man and had him in handcuffs, with his ankles bound, before removing his full body bind.

"But you're a wizard!" he pleaded with the British man.

"Yes, I am. I'm on loan from Her Majesty's government, actually. I'm here to help the Yanks clean up things," the British wizard replied smoothly. "Our chaps and their class system left quite a lot of unhappy first born for the British government to entice into service. Your system wasn't nearly as biased, but we still found people who owed their loyalty to God and country rather than magic. We're training up a fair number of your people."

Baker could only stare at him in horror. Wizards working with muggles? British wizards training Americans to work against the Department of Magic? Impossible!

Four very uncomfortable and very disagreeable hours later, he knew the truth. Wizards, British and American, were working with muggles all right.

He had personally seen two more British wizards instructing the Americans in things to watch for. He had witnessed a British wizard teaching very specific spells to an American wizard, designed to locate portkeys and place wards.

While blood purity wasn't as strong a sentiment in the US as it was in the UK, there was enough of it to generate a sizable population of

disaffected wizards. The federal government had found them the same way the British did, through their educational records.

Baker was ushered into a room with a table and two chairs. One side of the room held a large mirror. He looked at his image and blanched. The orange jumpsuit was ugly. Of course the hand cuffs and shackles around his ankles didn't help much with his image.

He slumped into the chair and a moment later the door opened.

The President walked in and sat across the table from his former Secretary of Magic and frowned. "Mr. Baker, thanks to the secrecy surrounding your world, we find ourselves in an interesting position."

"You will release me now!" snarled Baker. He was sure the compulsions were still on the President.

The President smiled thinly. "I think you'll find that your memory charms and compulsions have all been removed. In a little while, a lawyer will be admitted to help you with your defense. However, you are going to be tried in a State Department secret court for insurrection and treason. If you cooperate, you'll get life in Leavenworth Prison. If you refuse to cooperate, the federal prosecutors will press for the death penalty."

He paused and his smile broadened. "I wouldn't hope too much for rescue. You see, the British were kind enough to loan us a large number of wizards who were unhappy with their wizarding society. Even as we speak, they are fanning out across the U.S., installing wards to protect special facilities and key government offices.

"And right now, while you sit here in handcuffs, your Department of Magic is under assault by marine units. I'm afraid the casualties will be high on both sides, but we outnumber you and an assault rifle can shoot one hundred rounds in the time it takes you to get one spell off."

Baker's shoulders slumped. He was defeated and he knew it. He had underestimated the President and had been sure the British Ministry of Magic had their muggles under control.

"What do you want?" he whispered.

"Your cooperation," the President said coldly. "You live on our soil. You are citizens of this nation, bound to our laws and have a responsibility to it. You will help us bring your department back to where it belongs, as a law abiding department of the federal government and not an independent entity."

The President stood and looked down at the man, the disgust in his visage was obvious. "I'll send your lawyer in, but remember, Baker, it's the lives of your people that are being wasted. Cooperate and perhaps you can save some of them."

The President turned and exited the room. A moment later, Baker began to silently weep as his world crashed down around him.

The Americans were finally getting their act together. In short order they would begin helping the British in an effort to determine the status of their other allies.

Campbeltown Infirmary, March 25th...

Harry awoke to an interesting sensation. His head felt like it was going to explode and he was sure his left eyeball was growing hair! The other strange sensation was the pile of people around him.

Hermione and May were close enough to touch, but so was Mariah and several others. He was a bit relieved to see that everyone was still fully dressed. He was not sure what he would have done had he woken up to find himself surrounded by naked people.

He stood carefully and threaded his way over the still sleeping forms, noting that some were definitely cuddling with each other. Draco and Michelle were wrapped around each other. Surprisingly, Millicent Bulstrode had Robert Malwich and Samuel Hinerman cuddled up to her. Personal relationships were not his business in his opinion and as long as no one got hurt, he wasn't planning on getting involved. No, he'd stay out of it, and gladly, even if it did involve a former Pure Blood and two muggles.

Spotting Luna, he couldn't help but stop and wonder how she managed to sleep laying over the back of the sofa like that. Then he absently noted that he could see what color panties she wore. He tore his eyes from the sight and shook his head, then froze as his brain seemed to slosh around in his skull painfully.

Taking a deep breath, he stepped out of his Weyr and nearly bumped into Remus, who stood, grinning. Without a word, the older man held up a vial.

Taking it, Harry looked at the vial in his hands, then slowly back up at Remus.

"Hangover remedy," he murmured.

Harry winced at the softly spoken word, then gulped down the potion immediately.

Remus watched with amusement. When he noted the potion taking effect, he jerked a thumb back toward Harry's quarters. "You know, Harry, usually an orgy requires people to remove their clothing."

Harry blushed. "It was nothing like that, Remus. Luna had this drink, you see, and well, she had a lot of it and..."

He trailed off and blushed. "Oh, bugger, I don't know what happened. One moment we were all sitting around talking, the next I'm waking up next to four girls and there are people sprawled everywhere."

Remus laughed and clapped him on the back. "I seem to recall a few times after we graduated where we found ourselves in similar situations," he offered. "I remember one time when your mum was pregnant with you and she couldn't take the hangover potion. I thought she was going to kill James for breathing too loudly."

Harry laughed softly at the image. It was a tale he hadn't heard about his parents, who were normally painted as saintly heroes, rather than simple human beings, with all the foibles that entailed.

"Are you going to check on Sirius?" Remus asked.

Harry nodded and looked at him worriedly.

Remus held up his hands. "Relax. He's fine. I understand he spent the night comfortably." He held up a large jug. "Let me just place this inside your door, then we'll go check on him."

"Hangover remedy?" Harry asked.

Remus grinned. "Do you really want to deal with Hermione or May when they're hung over? Or worse, Luna?"

Harry blanched and shook his head. He wasn't that brave. "Leave it inside the door and hopefully you won't wake any of them," he said, then he started walking towards the infirmary.

"You're not going to wait for me?" Remus called.

Harry turned and smirked at him. "What and be caught with you? I'm going to let them sacrifice you to the God of hangovers."

Nearly an hour later, a very disheveled Remus caught up with Harry inside the infirmary. Harry glanced up from his position by Sirius' bed and grinned. "You're alive!" he exclaimed softly.

"No thanks to you," Remus grumbled. "Tell me, did you ask Chekiath to fart? I opened the door to find most of them coughing and moaning. It was an awful smell! Then they noticed me with the hangover remedy."

A low raspy chuckle broke off their conversation and they turned to see Sirius laughing weakly on the bed. Though he laughed, they could both see him grimacing. Harry immediately reached for the pain relief potion next to his bed and Remus rushed over to help Sirius sit up.

"Relax, Siri," Remus said gently. "You took a real nasty hit to your chest. Madam Pomfrey fixed you up but you're going to be in here for at least four more days."

Harry held the cup to his lips and he batted at it feebly before giving into the inevitable and drinking it down.

"Was anyone else hurt?" he whispered.

Remus gently lowered him back down and used the button on the side of the bed to raise him to a sitting position. Sirius' eyes gleamed and he eyed the control with interest. Lord Mills had equipped their infirmary with eight modern hospitable beds, including controls to let the patient sit up. A small television was fitted to a movable arm that he could also control.

"Just the wizard that cursed you. He's missing most of an arm and broke both his legs in an accident," Harry said with a smirk.

Sirius arched an eyebrow and turned to Remus, who chuckled and shook his head.

"No, it wasn't me. It was an accident that Chekiath jumped on him."

"See?" Harry exclaimed. "Even Remus knows it was an accident."

Sirius chuckled weakly, and grabbed at his ribs with both hands.

"We don't know the full story yet, Siri, but your attacker is under guard in the next room. We think he may have been sent by the Ministry, but there are some inconsistencies with that theory. When we know, you'll know. In the meantime, we need you to get better," Remus said.

"Yes, get better," Harry echoed, then he choked up and turned away.

Remus and Sirius exchanged a glance and Sirius reached out and tugged on Harry's shirt.

When the young man turned back to look at him, Sirius smiled weakly. "Don't get all mushy on us, Harry," he whispered.

Harry flushed and looked down and Sirius tugged on his shirt again. "I know," he whispered.

Harry nodded and grabbed his hand, not trusting himself to speak.

After a few minutes, he stood and looked down at Sirius. "You have a lot of people who want to see you get better, including Norendrath, who's been hovering nearby. I'll be back later in the day to check on you."

Sirius smiled at him and gave a little wave.

Harry smiled. "Behave yourself and I'll see if I can swipe Dan's newspaper so you can ogle the page three girl."

Sirius' smile broadened and he watched Harry move off to the aid station where Corporal Stone sat.

"Corporal Stone?"

"Sir?"

"How fares our other guest?" Harry asked.

"We've got him under guard. One of the special detail is always with him, but he's unconscious, and according to your Madam Pomfrey, we shouldn't expect him to awake for at least another day. He took a nasty hit to his head when the dragon knocked him to the ground," Stone said.

Harry nodded. "When you get within four hours of that, make sure you have two people in there. If I can cast magic wandlessly, he may be able to, as well."

Stone looked up at Harry in surprise. "Blimey! No wand? I'll warn Captain Atkins right away."

Harry smiled tightly. "Also, when he wakes up, I think it would be best if you inform Captain Atkins and Remus Lupin. I don't think I could resist the urge to slowly peel his skin from his body."

Stone paled and nodded. "I'll do that, sir. Don't you worry none."

Harry nodded and stepped from the infirmary. He took a deep breath and summoned his flying gear.

"Fancy a fly, Cheki? I feel the need to get away for a bit," he asked.

Chekiath's voice was tinged with amusement. "Might as well. The last of the riders left our Weyr. How is Smelly Dog?"

"Recovering. I think he'll be all right," Harry replied unhappily.

"He'll be fine then and we'll be flying," Chekiath declared.

Harry chuckled and climbed onto his dragon's back. "Let's go," he said simply and the pair leapt skyward.

Ministry of Magic, March 26th...

"So, is it all set?" asked Delores.

"Yes, ma'am. I double checked the account this morning. The money is in our accounts, but there is one slight problem."

Umbridge frowned. "Yes?"

"The Goblins at Gringotts took the non-liquid assets from the vault and sent them to Mrs. Malfoy for disposition. I fear this action has alerted her to what is happening."

Umbridge looked at her second in command of the WDF. "What would you suggest?"

The man smiled back at her. "I think that Mrs. Malfoy should go the way her husband did, with one slight difference. We should pin the murder of her husband on her. This way she can die resisting arrest."

Umbridge returned the smile. "Do it that way. Cornelius isn't due back for a few days. I want to get this mess behind us before he arrives."

The man nodded. "My lady," he said with a slight bow, then he turned and walked from her office.

Umbridge admired his buttocks as he left and contemplated taking him as a lover. He was pliable enough and had just the right amount of fear to make it delicious. The hoops he'd jump through to keep his wife from learning of it would provide her with much amusement.

Umbridge's plan for taking over the Ministry was proceeding exactly on schedule.

Campbeltown Weyr, March 27th...

As predicted, Sirius was on the mend and starting to chaff under the restrictions of being in the infirmary. What wasn't predicted by anyone was the emotional state of Captain Atkins, who upbraided Sirius for performing what was her job. That in itself wasn't the issue,

but then she scolded him for nearly getting killed before they could date.

Needless to say, that had a number of people in the Weyr chuckling. Sirius had a hunted look about him and Norendrath was walking around chortling over the entire affair. Once, at Hogwarts, Sirius had a serious reputation as a ladies man. Since his escape from Azkaban, he had not been on a date even once. Being a wanted felon seriously cramped his style. He wasn't sure what he was supposed to do on a date anymore, and the idea of dating a muggle worried him. He was afraid he'd screw up big time.

All this had the added benefit of keeping him confined to his bed where he felt safe.

Harry was sitting in the kitchen hall when Fawkes returned from his daily trip to Hogwarts. It was unusual, but about one trip in ten Minerva sent a copy of the Daily Prophet back with Fawkes after telling the Phoenix to deliver the paper to Harry. Usually it was obvious what she wanted him to see, something relating to dragons, or to him directly.

They had dropped the restrictions on Minerva remembering where Dumbledore was, as it appeared that the Ministry was not interested in questioning her. Their exact location was unknown to her, but she knew now that Albus and Harry were together, along with Hermione.

"Thank you, Fawkes. Albus is still in his quarters, so you should find him there," Harry said, taking the paper from the bird.

Fawkes trilled and vanished again in a burst of fire as Harry unrolled the paper and started to look at it. It was apparent almost immediately what Minerva wanted him to see. The hat had erased her memory of where Malfoy had gone and Madam Pomfrey never spoke of who she saw when she was called to help someone, but she had her suspicions and she already knew about Harry and Hermione being together.

Lucius Malfoy Murdered by Wife after making Patriotic Gesture.

Witnesses Stunned.

Just a day after making a stunning patriotic gesture by donating a large sum of money to the Wizarding Defense Forces, Lucius Malfoy was killed by his wife, who was enraged by the act.

The brutal murder was witnessed in the Ministry Atrium by the security guard on duty, as well as two members of the Wizarding Defense Forces.

Elmo Watkins said, "The couple were fighting loudly just in front of the fountain. I couldn't see them well, so I moved to get a better view. Lucius moved closer to his wife in a threatening manner and she hit him full on in the neck with a reductor curse. He fell backwards and bled out less than a minute later.

"I was shocked. Here was this great man, cut down like a dog right in front of me. I pulled my wand and managed to get a curse off. I think I hit her, but I'm not sure. She saw me, then noticed the others and she apparated away."

WDF spokesman and second in command of the force, Brent Thompson had this to say. "In light of the problems being experienced with the DMLE and the Ministry efforts to restructure that department, we have been authorized to apprehend Mrs. Malfoy. I sent a squad out to Malfoy manor and we are endeavoring to break down the wards to get to her. Right now, we know for a fact that she's holed up in her home and refusing to come out."

The DMLE force quit en masse a few days ago over working conditions and disputes over pay, leaving Wizarding Britain without a law enforcement body. We are lucky that the WDF is able to step in and take over that roll.

Mrs. Malfoy, when apprehended, will be charged with murder and resisting arrest.

This is not the first tragedy to visit the Malfoy family this year. Draco Malfoy, heir and scion to the family name, has been missing since early February. Rumors have it that this once proud Pure Blood engaged in a liaison with a muggle born witch and the pair ran away to avoid the stigma of her pregnancy.

According to Ministry sources, Malfoy fell for the wiles of one Hermione Granger, who is also listed as missing. Miss Granger was

known to be a close associate of Harry Potter and probably helped him formulate his part in the dragon crisis.

Harry read the article a second time, then he rolled up the paper and sat back thinking.

"Dobby," he called.

The little elf appeared a moment later and he smiled at him. "Dobby, I have an unusual request for you. Can you still enter Malfoy manor and not be seen?"

Dobby nodded reluctantly and Harry patted him gently on the shoulder. "Can you tell if Mrs. Malfoy is there and not let her see you?"

"Dobby doesn't need to go to bad master's home for that, Harry Potter sir. I can feel her in the home still. Bad master broke the bond and until I has a new bond I can feel them. Little master is in the big building with dragons and riders. Missy Narcissa is in her bedroom," Dobby said, then he paused and his eyes widened. "I cannot feels bad master."

Harry nodded. "I know, Dobby."

He started to stand when Dobby stopped him. "Harry Potter sir?"

He turned to look at the little elf. "Yes?"

"Would Harry Potter sir let Dobby bond with you? It would make Dobby very happy to be your elf."

Harry sat back down and looked at Dobby. "I will agree," he said, holding up a hand to forestall the elf. "But I want you to promise me two things first. If you ever want to leave, you will tell me. And you will not punishing yourself, ever. I don't have a problem with you bonding with me, but you'll never be a slave. I'll continue to pay you as I have been."

Dobby nodded and lifted Harry's right hand, pressing it to his forehead. He felt a momentary wrenching sensation.

Dobby smiled broadly. "Dobby will do his best for you, Harry Potter sir."

Harry nodded, but frowned. "Dobby, does this mean you can no longer go to Malfoy manor?"

Dobby shook his head. "No, sir. Wizard wards don't stop elves, Harry Potter sir."

Harry breathed a sigh of relief, then he stood. "All right, then. I may need you to visit there later, but for now you can go back to what you were doing."

Dobby nodded and vanished.

Harry picked up the newspaper and walked over to Hangar Two where Momnarth and Hagrid were working the riders through their wing exercises. He entered and stood off to one side watching for a moment.

"You're worried about something," Chekiath observed.

"I am," he replied. "What do you think of Sinnath?"

"He's a little short, but he's growing well. He won't be as big as me but I like him and his rider. Draco is less stuffy now that he's decided to mate with Michelle. I'm sure he'll be even less stuffy once he actually does it. You'd be less stuffy if you took a couple of the girls as mates, too. You humans make mating too complicated."

Harry grimaced. He really didn't need to know about Draco's love life.

"Do you think they are ready for a long jump Between?" he asked.

"I think Momnarth is overly cautious. Many of our riders are ready for long jumps. You brought some of them to Gringotts. They were ready then and they're ready now," Chekiath replied.

Hermione and May nodded to Harry and he smiled in return. As Hagrid passed May, she nudged him and pointed to Harry, who was waiting patiently for his friend to spot him.

Hagrid smiled and walked over to Harry. "Good mornin', Harry. Do yeh need summat?"

Harry thought about the news he was bringing, then he sighed. There was no avoiding it. "Can I see Draco for a bit?"

Hagrid nodded, then he turned to the riders and let loose with a piercing whistle. "Draco, the Weyrleader wants to talk with yeh."

Draco trotted over to where Harry stood. He motioned the blond to follow him into the hangar office.

There was signs all over the hangar of the work that was about to begin, but right now it was still the old layout. James had obtained a large supply of partitions and was working on a layout for the building that would create several offices, class rooms and a large area for riders and dragons.

Harry waited until Draco had followed him into the office, then he closed the door and turned to the blond.

"What's wrong?" Draco asked.

Harry handed him the paper and waited.

Draco's complexion paled almost immediately. After a couple minutes he put the paper down and looked at Harry with anguish. "It's not possible. My Mum couldn't have done it. Her marriage vow would have prevented it."

"Oh?"

"The Malfoys have used the same magical marriage vows for centuries. Once, a husband killed his wife. His son then killed his father and from that day forward the family used a set of vows that would prevent either spouse from killing the other without dying themselves," Draco replied.

Harry nodded and leaned against the wall. He eyed Draco carefully and considered the issue for a moment longer. "Well, what do you want to do about it?" he asked finally.

"Do?"

"She's holed up in your home. Dobby says she's still there. I've never met her, Draco, but she's your mum. I would go to the ends of the earth to help my mum," Harry said softly. "But it's something that I'll never be able to do."

He nodded and looked at Harry. "I understand what you're saying, but you don't understand the situation," Draco said plaintively.

Harry shook his head. In his mind this was a straightforward thing. "I guess I don't," he said slowly. "Why don't you explain it to me?"

"My parents are the worst kind of bigots. My mother wouldn't approve of Michelle as a mistress, let alone wife. And my bond with Sinnath? She's not going to approve of any of what we're doing here."

Harry frowned. "I'm sorry," he said softly. "I guess I just assumed you'd want to help her. It's hard for me to envision growing up with parents, but I always thought it would be a wonderful thing."

"It can be, but parents are only human. My father was never a very nice man, but Mum cared. Unfortunately, she is a very opinionated woman."

"So you don't want to rescue her?" Harry asked intently.

"Even knowing what you know, you'd still rescue her?" Draco asked in surprise.

Harry shrugged. "Why would the Ministry want her? Maybe she knows something about what they are doing?"

"Or maybe she's just the person they decided to use as the scapegoat for my father's murder," Draco countered.

Harry nodded. "It's possible, but we won't know until we ask. Besides, Draco, she's your mum. You changed greatly coming here. Maybe she will also."

"Or maybe we'll be bringing a real pain in the ass to the Weyr," Draco added in warning.

Harry smiled. "True, but if she turns out to be that much of a distraction, I'll give you my permission to pick her up and dump her anywhere on the planet."

Draco smiled at the thought. "All right then, how will we handle this?"

"Easy. Write a note telling her that you'll be coming by on dragon back. Tell her to get up on the roof of the manor and to dress warmly. If she wants to bring some clothing, tell her to pack and shrink it all down. When you've done that, call Dobby and tell him I said it's all right to deliver the message to Narcissa. In the meantime, I'll put together our wing riders."

Draco nodded and moved to sit at the desk so he could write his message.

Harry watched him for a moment, then sighed and turned away, his mind on the business at hand. As he stepped out of the office and walked around to face everyone, a silence fell on the group.

He looked at them and smiled tightly. "According to today's Wizzarding newspaper, Draco's mother is accused of killing her husband. Draco assures me that the magical marriage vows used by his family would make such an action impossible.

"He also tells me that she is a blood purist of the worst sort. Draco has rejected the bigotry that she espouses, but that has not changed her position. I asked him pointedly what he wanted to do. She is currently barricaded in her home with strong wards protecting her, but they will not last forever. She may end up being a very disruptive influence in the Weyr, and I've told Draco that if that happens, he has my permission to snatch her up and drop her anywhere on the planet away from here.

"Given that we could be bringing a very probable problem to our Weyr, I would like ten of you to volunteer to help with the effort to remove Draco's mum from danger and bring her here."

A bunch of hands were raised and he nodded. He wasn't surprised to see Michelle had her hand up first, Hermione and May also volunteered. Ronan Clark and Karen Khan also raised their hands along with many others.

He signaled to them one at time, selecting ten people and they stepped forward. "Get into your flight suits," he told them.

Draco stepped from the office and he paused to watch the people run from the hangar, heading to their Weyrs to get suited up.

"Is that it?" asked Harry, pointing to the parchment in Draco's hand.

He nodded and handed it to Harry. He glanced at it briefly, then he called for Dobby. When the little elf appeared, he gave him the note. "Can you have one of our other elves deliver this to Narcissa Malfoy, Dobby? I don't want to risk sending you there."

Dobby's ears drooped slightly. "Harry Potter sir, it would be best if Dobby does this. Mistress Narcissa might kill an elf she doesn't know."

Harry grimaced. And she might kill you, my little friend, he thought unhappily. "Very well, Dobby, but I want you to give it to her and leave immediately afterward. No matter what commands she gives you, you're to come straight home."

Dobby nodded and with a pop, he vanished from the hangar.

Harry turned back to Draco. "We'll give her fifteen minutes to get into position. Since you know the area, we're going to need you to provide flight imagery."

Draco nodded. "I better get my kit on."

Harry nodded absently, then walked out of the hangar after waving to Hagrid. Chekiath waited outside for him.

Twenty minutes later they came out of Between high above Malfoy manor. Harry surveyed the region. Below them was a large manor house. Flashes of light came from the gate. His eyes narrowed when he spotted more than a dozen wizards facing the gate and casting spells, trying to drain the wards of their power.

A quick glance below showed a figure looking around in bewilderment on a small observation platform. Like so many older pure blood homes, there was a flat platform on the roof that was

used to take astronomical observations and for occasional rituals involving the moon and equinoxes.

While rituals observing the seasons had fallen out of practice, it was common for all of the large manors to have such platforms, merely as a statement of prestige.

"Sinnath, Wivaronth and Trath, go down to the house and pick up Narcissa. Sinnath, you and your rider will handle the pickup, while the other two will maintain a flight cover. The rest of you, prepare to follow me. We're going to lay down a line of low powered flame about twenty yards behind those wizards. Hopefully it will startle them and spook them into fleeing," Harry sent to the wing. "Sinnath, when I'm in position, make the pickup and return to the Weyr. We'll make one pass and follow you home."

The wing split into the two groups and Harry aimed his larger group to an area near where he wanted to flame. So far they hadn't been spotted from the ground.

"We are in position, Weyrleader," Sinnath said.

Harry glanced around and saw they were all set. "Now," he commanded, then placed Chekiath into a shallow dive. He wasn't trying to hurt anyone here, so he was careful to place the flame close enough to scare, but cause no real harm.

The line of flame appearing behind the wizards had the desired effect and Harry was sure they hadn't spotted him. They took one look at the flames and portkeyed away.

Ministry of Magic, Department of Mysteries March 27th...

Alejandro Croaker watched his last co-worker use his portkey and vanish. Yesterday, three of his researchers had been detained and illegally interrogated by members of the WDF. And now one of his operatives was missing.

He knew instantly what had happened, as the globes monitoring their life signs dimmed. They had been forced, via veritaserum, to violate their vows and the magic of those vows killed them. He had raced up stairs to help them, but he was too late to stop their deaths. As it was, he was just able to get back down to the department level

and seal it off. Hot on his heels were fifty WDF wizards who were stymied by the fact that the Department seemed to have vanished. It was still there, but now a layer of solid granite eight feet thick blocked all access points.

Since yesterday he had been working with his people to make sure they had places to go. Bolt holes where they could hide, or ways to leave the country entirely. It was all falling apart and there was nothing he could do to stop it.

Albus Dumbledore had not responded to his letter, and other than some former Aurors, there was no one he could turn to. He had no doubt in his mind that the WDF had announced he was wanted for some made up crime by now.

He picked up his own portkey and walked over to a large wall. He traced a set of runes against the wall and it lifted away, revealing a surprisingly muggle looking machine. He smiled softly at the machine, which had been installed just after World War II when the current Head of the department had realized that the muggles were pulling far ahead of the wizards. His mentor felt that the department needed a safe guard that would stymy wizards, so he opted for this muggle alternative.

Lovingly cared for and maintained, the tanks behind the walls would flood the department with odorless carbon monoxide if someone broke through at one of the access points. There wasn't an infinite supply of gas, but there was enough to cause quite a problem for anyone breaking in. Each major section of the department had its own lethal trap. This was but the first.

With a few flicks of his wand and ten minutes of turning some valves, he was ready to leave. He fingered his portkey and then he was gone, off to his fidelius protected cottage in Cambridge where hopefully he could safely get a handle on what was going on with the country.

Near total silence descended in the last bastion of sanity the Ministry had. The only sounds were those of the WDF attempting to break through the granite barrier.

Campbeltown Weyr, March 27th...

He awoke to pain unlike any other he had ever felt before and he groaned.

"Ah, good. You're awake," said a voice that he didn't recognize.

He opened his eyes and looked around warily. He was in a small room that had bars on the windows and four men staring at him harshly.

A man stepped forward. He had dark brown hair, streaked with gray. Another man set up a video camera and pointed it at him. Beyond those two men were two others wearing the uniforms of the British Army.

"Where am I?" he said, then he gasped as a wave of pain passed through him.

"You were captured attempting to break into the Campbeltown weyr," said Lord Mills, who was done fussing with the camera.

The man's eyes darted to the two soldiers who wore sidearms and had clearly visible wands holstered on their belts.

"We have some questions for you," said Remus. "The first, of course, is why are you here? The second is probably obvious, but we'll ask anyway. Who sent you?"

The man on the bed glared. "I don't have to tell you anything."

Remus smiled slightly. "You think you're in pain now? Let me explain our plans for you, my friend. If you don't answer our questions, we'll be dragging you out of your comfortable bed, taking you outside, stripping you naked and tying you to a post. Once done, you will be bathed in low level dragon fire. That fire, once lit, can never be put out. Just imagine it. You will burn for the rest of your days and no potion, no spell, will ever abate it."

"Remus," James said in caution, then he stepped closer. "I am Lord Mills, the Prime Minister's personal representative here at Campbeltown. Right now, I'm probably the one person who can help you the most. Remus here is in favor of bathing you in dragon fire for what you did to his friend. And I don't need to tell you, you're

surrounded by dragons who would dearly love to help the Weyrleader by frying you up for breakfast."

"But, but, Black! Did I get him? We have to warn the Ministry! Black is dangerous," exclaimed the man.

"Oh, shit," muttered Remus, then he glared at the man. "You shot someone just because he looked like Sirius Black? What if he wasn't?"

The man blinked and stared at Remus. "He wasn't Black?"

"Oh, he was and he's mighty pissed at you. All things considered, I just might let him deal with you since he'll be out of the infirmary tomorrow. You, however, will have a much longer stay, as we used muggle medical techniques on you. That will make it easier for Sirius to deal with you, as he won't have to hunt you down."

The man paled and stared at Remus. "But you're a wizard! You have wizards with you!"

James almost broke down in laughter at that point. Madam Pomfrey had healed the man's legs last night, as well as healing what was left of his arm. His pain was that of strained muscles, and the mysterious, phantom pain that often accompanied the loss of a limb.

"So, why are you here?" Remus asked pleasantly, though his eyes burned with anger.

"I was looking for missing wizards," muttered the man.

"Missing wizards?" repeated James in confusion.

"We had this list of wizards who'd gone back to the muggle world. We'd been keeping track of them when they vanished," explained the man. "I stumbled onto Xeno Lovegood a few weeks back and he spoke of magic being done near the coast. He wouldn't say where, so I lifted some images from his thoughts."

"He voluntarily allowed you to do this?" exclaimed Remus.

The man on the bed looked away and refused to answer. Remus' frown turn into a scowl. "I think perhaps it's best if we turn you over

to the muggles to deal with. You can't stay here. Your life will be forfeit in hours if you do. And we certainly aren't going to turn you over to the Ministry."

James looked at Remus strangely, then motioned him to follow. Once outside the room, he turned to Remus. "What was that all about in there? You know Harry doesn't want him turned over to anyone until we find out what he's doing here."

Remus rubbed his face tiredly. "James, that man in there just admitted to using a form of mind reading on Xeno Lovegood. As angry as Harry can get, if Xeno's daughter discovers we're holding the man that mind raped her father, she'll roast us all under a slow flame while she tortures him. She is the sweetest girl in the world, but like every member of the Lovegood family, you do not hurt one of them and live. If he's lucky, he obliviated Xeno and it took. The Lovegoods are notorious for being immune to mind magic. Most likely all our guest got was a brief glimpse of some landmarks and a massive headache for his effort."

"And if he's not lucky?" asked James worriedly.

"The obliviate will wear off, and Xeno will arrange for something very bad to happen to our guest in there. And frankly, you don't want to get caught up in that if you can avoid it," Remus said bluntly.

James nodded. "I suppose you could release him to Captain Atkins after wiping his memories. Then we can just set him free."

"Or you could just let me talk with him," said a voice behind them. Both men whirled around and spotted Luna standing behind them looking very focused. "You know, I came here looking for Remus so I could warn him that Harry had taken a wing of riders to rescue Narcissa Malfoy from the Ministry and I couldn't help but overhear you discussing a man who mind raped my father. This is turning out to be an interesting day."

Remus held up a hand placatingly. Luna seemed calm and reserved, but the magic roiling around the young witch was making him nauseous. "Luna, please. What would Harry say if you killed him?"

Luna pinned him with her gaze. "My Weyrleader would thank me for protecting our Weyr from a dangerous intruder who nearly killed his

godfather. But don't worry, Remus, I'm not going to kill him. Daddy already did that. That man is a walking corpse. He just don't know it yet."

Luna started to turn, then she stopped and smiled sweetly at the pair. "Never try to hide anything me, gentlemen. Especially something involving my family. I usually know about these little matters, sometimes before they even happen."

James frowned. "Your father killed him? He's still alive, Luna."

Luna nodded. "Yes, Daddy's technique is slow acting, but it's effective. He'll slowly lose his ability to think, then he'll simply forget to breath. He has less than a year to live. There's something different in the makeup of my family. A passive Legilimency scan will result in a day's migraine. A directed assault will kill the attacker."

She smiled brightly. "Daddy says it's because we mated with Nargles sometime in the past, but my Mum was convinced there is Fey in our ancestry. I'm not sure which is true, but I like the Nargle theory, if for no other reason than it leaves people wondering."

With that she walked away, leaving both men confused and wondering about the girl and her family.

James and Remus exchanged a look, then James muttered, "Well, we don't have to worry about Luna, at least."

Remus nodded, then he stopped suddenly. "Wait. Rescue Narcissa Malfoy?" He turned again, but Luna was no where in sight.

Meanwhile, in the office setup for him, Dumbledore was busy working on the day's lessons for his magical students. He only had them for two hours a day, in the mornings, but he tried to cram as much Defense, Charms and Transfiguration into those two hours as he could. Potions he offered only as a mentoring role, as the subject had become a self study course. He was available for a hour each evening to oversee any brewing.

It was challenging work and very rewarding. Without the bother of formal grades it was a lot easier for the students and for himself. Sirius and Remus helped out as much as they could, as both men were exceptional wizards in their own rights.

He pushed aside today's lesson plan now that it was completed and he reached for Minerva's letter. They only communicated a few times a week now, although Fawkes visited her every morning to make sure she didn't have something to send to him.

He read the letter wistfully and wished he was back at his school. Life in the Weyr was remarkably different and when he was honest with himself, he admitted he didn't like change very much. The Weyr was all about change; change to the lives of muggles, change to the lives of wizards, and most certainly change to the lives of the riders.

He looked up when he heard shouting and frowned. Someone outside was screaming at the top of their lungs and was being rather vile about it. Standing, he made his way outside to find an incongruous sight.

Narcissa Malfoy was backed against a wall, screaming at Draco, who was flushed with embarrassment. Albus had arrived at a point where her lungs needed a refill and she was breathing in, no doubt for her next barrage, when a voice snapped across the tarmac like a whip.

"So, this is what the refined wizarding elite are like? Polite and grateful for being rescued from the Ministry," Harry said with a sneer. Chekiath moved to his side and Narcissa turned white. The dragon released a small bit of smoke from his nostrils and growled ominously.

"How dare..."

"Shut up!" screamed Draco. "Mother, are you an imbecile? You stand here, alone, just you and your wand, against multiple dragons? You wouldn't last ten seconds."

For the first time she really noticed the large number of dragons arrayed out in front of her, as well as the people who stared at her in utter disdain.

"And I'd have no problems giving that order," Harry added. "Now, you will surrender your wand to your son. When and if he feels you can behave well enough, he'll give it back. If, on the other hand, you can't behave yourself or you disrupt my Weyr, Draco will return your

wand and drop you in the center of Diagon Alley. No doubt the good folks in the Wizarding Defense Force would love to speak with such a refined and upstanding member of the community."

Dumbledore stepped forward while the sounds of running feet signaled the approach of many more people. "Perhaps if I explain things to Mrs. Malfoy it might ease tensions," he said soothingly.

Remus and James arrived with Captain Atkins. All three were panting slightly in the cold air.

"What is going on here?" demanded Katherine.

"Let's all go to my office and we can talk about it over a cup of tea," Albus suggested. He walked forward and gently took Narcissa by the arm. She walked with him, but her eyes never left Chekiath, who tracked her every movement.

Harry nodded to Draco and he approached. "Go with them and make sure she's disarmed. If you don't get her wand, one of the others must or we'll remove her today. I'm willing to give her a chance to earn her place here, but I'm not going to let her have a wand until I can trust her around our riders."

Draco nodded. "Thanks, Harry," he said with a weak grin, then he moved off following the adults.

Harry watched then all vanish inside the building, then he turned to Chekiath. "Some days I think it would be great to just get away from all this."

Chekiath turned to eye him. "Perhaps. But where else would you find so many nice females who have their own dragons?"

Harry grimaced when Hermione opened her mouth to speak. Fortunately for him, someone beat her to it. "Chekiath is a fine dragon," Comaloth said. "You should be nice to his rider, Hermione. I know Chekiath will try to mate with me. The Weyrleader can do the same for you."

Harry vaulted onto Chekiath's back. "Let's give the Weyr a flyover. We should check security, you know," he said, speaking quickly.

Chekiath sprang into the air to the sounds of many voices laughing.

Hermione is gonna kill me, he thought sourly. He could still hear her sputtering.

Dumbledore's Office, Campbeltown Weyr...

Draco squeezed into the already crowded office just in time to hear several people demanding explanations.

He leaned against the door with his arms folded across his chest. Like so many of the riders, once he'd bonded, he'd discovered a new confidence within himself. Now that he was seeing Michelle, that confidence had grown more obvious to those around him.

"If you'll all be quiet, I'll explain what happened and why," he said in a loud tone, cutting across the noise.

Everyone turned to look at him.

"Harry came to me this morning and showed me the paper. My father has been murdered., No great loss there. He was scum. But my mother is being blamed for it. Given the Malfoy marriage vows, she would have died if she had been responsible."

Narcissa looked outraged by his comments but one look at Draco made her hold her tongue. Her son had changed. She didn't know the young man standing in the doorway anymore.

"Harry asked if I wanted to help her. I warned him about her views, but Harry has no experience with parents, good or bad. All he knew was my 'mum' was in trouble. We decided that we'll rescue her anyway for one simple reason. The Ministry wants her badly enough to try breaking down some of the strongest wards outside of Hogwarts, so perhaps she knows something of value. Harry decided, and I agreed, that she'll be given a chance to earn her place here in the Weyr.

"I'm not picky, but one of us is going to take her wand. Harry will not allow her to go around armed until she's earned that right."

"Why, that arrogant half blood!" spat Narcissa.

"Shut up, woman," Draco said, then he stepped closer to her and grabbed her right arm and pushed up the sleeve. The Dark Mark was clearly visible. "Malfoy's bow to no one," he sneered at her. "And yet you bear the mark of being Voldemort's slave. You let him brand your flesh, like cattle! You are an idiot, as was my father. You were both conned into following a half blood who wasn't even as pure as Harry Potter. At least both of his parents were magical. Voldemort's father was a muggle, you ignorant cow!"

Narcissa stumbled back. "No, you lie!" she screamed.

"Alas, I'm afraid young Draco is not lying, Mrs Malfoy. Your Dark Lord Voldemort was born of an impoverished woman named Merope Gaunt, one of the last links to the Slytherin line. His father was Tom Riddle, the muggle son of a local aristocrat," Albus said.

Narcissa stared at him in astonishment. "No, it can't be."

"It is, Mother," Draco said coldly. And with that single statement, everyone present came to understand the situation. To Draco, she wasn't 'mum', she was 'Mother'. It was an important distinction and one that Harry had no concept of.

"Here's how it's going to be, Mother," Draco said. "You're in the Campbeltown Weyr, surrounded by over five hundred dragons who don't like you very much. There are some wizards around, but mostly the people are muggles. You will be polite, regardless of their background. If you want to stay, you'll have to work to find yourself a niche in the Weyr. You will surrender your wand to one of us. If you wish to leave the protection of the Weyr, it will be returned to you. If you choose to stay here, then you will earn the right to carry a wand. At this moment, I don't trust you and neither does Harry."

She stared at him. "But, Draco, how can you take orders from these people? I raised you better."

"You raised me to be exactly what my father was; a murderer. I choose to be something different. I am Sinnath's rider and I can think of no greater honor than that," Draco said proudly.

"Your son, like all of the other riders, has bonded with a dragon, Mrs. Malfoy. It's a lot like a soul bond in it's capabilities."

"You bonded with a beast!" she screeched.

"I am no beast," Sinnath protested. The medium sized dragon moved so he was visible in the window.

Narcissa took one look and fainted dead away. Draco used the opportunity to remove her wand, which he handed to Remus. "Take her to the infirmary. When she wakes up, perhaps Sirius can calm her down. With my father dead and Sirius the Head of the Black family, she'll follow his commands, if no one else's," he said.

Draco turned and left the office. Outside the building, he found Sinnath and Michelle waiting for him anxiously. He pulled her into a tight hug and then he leaned against Sinnath. Michelle understood instinctively what he was doing and leaned with him, allowing both the dragon and herself to comfort him.

WDF Main Assembly Room, Ministry of Magic...

Brent Thompson frowned, seeing the twenty men return empty handed.

"Well? Where is that cow?" he demanded.

"We wuz attacked, sir," said one man.

"Dragons!" exclaimed another.

"Dragons?" repeated Thompson.

Several of his men nodded. "They dove down on us and we barely got away with our lives!" said one man.

"And Malfoy?"

"She was plucked right from the top o'the house! Right from under our noses!"

Thompson bit back a snarl. This was bad news and he'd have no choice but to report it. Umbridge had been making demands of him lately that he had been able to hold off, but sooner or later he was going to have to give her what she wanted.

It shamed him to be in this position, but Umbridge had far too much dirt on him. He just prayed his wife, Emily, never found out about his indiscretions.

He turned back to the group leader. "Take your men down to level nine. Help the group breaking into the Department of Mysteries. They're nearly through the wall that's in place."

The man nodded and waved to his men, who followed, relieved to be doing something safer than being assaulted by dragons.

Thompson straightened his back and took a deep breath, then he went to talk to the Boss.

Approaching Umbridge's office, her aide waved him inside. He slipped in quietly. He could hear she was busy talking to someone.

Fudge placed a trembling hand against his forehead. "They all resigned? We have no police force?" he exclaimed.

"We do have a force, Cornelius," Delores said placatingly. "I had my people slip into their roles so that our people wouldn't lose faith in their Ministry. I thought about arresting them, but to be honest, we had more important things to deal with and it's always been the right of an employee to resign their position."

Delores looked up and arched an eyebrow at Thompson's intrusion. "Yes?"

"I'm sorry, Ma'am, but the team attempting to apprehend Mrs. Malfoy was driven off the property by dragons."

Cornelius looked up sharply. "Malfoy? What in the blazes is going on here, Delores?"

Delores heaved a great sigh and looked at Cornelius with a mournful expression. "Cornelius, Narcissa and Lucius had a fight in the atrium. In front of witnesses she killed Lucius over his decision to donate a large sum of money to the Wizarding Defense Forces, then she apparated away.

"I personally reviewed the pensieve testimonies for myself and there can be no doubt that she was incensed over his generous donation.

She cast a curse that killed him. I asked Thompson here to send some men to bring her in for trial."

Cornelius looked between the two. "And dragons chased you off?" he asked incredulously.

Thompson nodded. "Yes, that's what my men reported. I wasn't there myself. I've been busy overseeing the attempt to break back into the Department of Mysteries."

Cornelius paled and he sat heavily in a chair. "The Department of Mysteries?" he echoed weakly.

"Yes," Delores said. "We learned that Croaker was plotting to overthrow you, Cornelius. Three of his people committed suicide rather than reveal the details of their plot, so I immediately ordered the arrest of everyone in the department. Croaker sealed the level against any intruders. We've been trying to break through for several days now."

Fudge played with his bowler nervously, then he turned to Delores. "I think it's time you tell me exactly what has been happening around here."

Delores smiled sweetly and waved Thompson out of the room. "Of course, Cornelius. I know you've heard about some problems, but really a lot of good things have happened as well."

Thompson breathed a sigh of relief and escaped the room. He was glad he didn't need to stick around for that conversation. He wasn't concerned for the Boss, or what they were doing. He knew that if Cornelius put up too much of a stink, Delores would arrange for an accident for the good Minister. He had no idea how wrong he was.

Office of the Minister for Magic, March 28th...

Delores Umbridge paused in front of the door to the office and checked her outfit, then she imperiously waved a hand at Weasley, and he opened the door for her.

She entered and smiled broadly when she spotted Cornelius nervously pacing the room with his bowler hat in his hands. She wanted him nervous. Nervous and pliable to her suggestions.

She sat calmly on the chair opposite his desk and he finally turned and eyed the crystal that signaled the room was private. When it glowed a moment later, he smiled thinly and sat down.

"Stupefy!" said a voice from behind Umbridge.

She jerked spasmodically and the room went dark. She awoke a few minutes later and the first thing she realized was that she couldn't move an inch. She looked around wildly for a moment, then spotted Cornelius.

"Cornelius!" she sputtered. "What is the meaning of this?"

Cornelius leaned back on his chair and eyed her for a moment. "I went home the other night and thought long and hard about what you've done, Delores. In a sense, you did me a great favor by eliminating some of the people that controlled what I did, and by eliminating some of my competition. But I also realized that you were setting yourself up to be the one in charge."

He leaned forward in his chair. "You will be in charge of what I let you be in charge of and you will follow my orders."

Umbridge growled lowly. "And if I don't," she snarled.

"Then I'm afraid that you will be accidentally kissed while making an inspection tour of Azkaban later today," he replied. "Clyde here will escort you to the prison while you're under an imperious and you will regrettably not survive your tour. I'm sure your second in charge would be happy to follow my orders."

Delores' eyes widened as she realized that she was not alone with Fudge. There was another man just at the edge of her peripheral vision and she could hear another breathing behind her.

"I'm going to offer you an out, Delores. You want power and I'm willing to let you have some of it, but as my second in command," he stated softly.

She looked at him warily. This was so totally out of character for Fudge that she was caught off guard. She couldn't believe she had underestimated the man so badly.

"What do you mean?" she stammered.

"Give me an unbreakable vow not to betray me and I'll let you continue to run the WDF."

"But," she sputtered, "you can't be serious!" An unbreakable vow would mean her death, or worse, the loss of her magic if she violated it!

"If you'd rather be kissed by a dementor, I can arrange it," he replied with a shrug.

She paled. "No! Anything but that."

Cornelius smiled. "Excellent," he said, then he pushed a parchment towards her.

She felt a wand dig into the back of her head and the full body bind was released by an unknown person. With a trembling hand, she reached for the parchment that contained the wording of the vow. She gave it a quick read and shuddered. This was worse than just agreeing to be loyal. It was just shy of abject slavery!

She pulled her wand and the wand poking her head pushed against her harder.

With a trembling voice she gave away her freedom and become Cornelius' slave. By the time she'd finished reading the vow and the binding magic of it began to fade, she was weeping uncontrollably. She had been outmaneuvered by the one person she thought least possible of doing it.

Fudge took the parchment from her limp hands and place it in his desk, then he looked at her. "Now, get out, you cow. I'll call for you later with new orders. Until then, go do something useful."

She wiped her tears against her sleeve and nodded. "Yes, sir."

Cornelius watched her leave the room wearing a cruel smile. Dumbledore was missing, Bones was dead and the DMLE gutted. As Croaker was now missing, all his opponents were gone except for the Wizengamot and he'd set Delores on them next. The beauty

of the whole scheme was that if something went wrong, she'd take the blame for it and he could claim to be the ignorant, bumbling fool he had been playing for years.

Perhaps the greatest surprise from the emergence of dragons as an intelligent species was the simultaneous rise to power of the first Weyrleader. From humble beginnings, Harry Potter rose to a position of warrior, statesman and protector of the non human sentient species on the planet. As the dragons rose to become an economic powerhouse, he successfully guided the Weyrs to the position they enjoy today, as partners and equals in human society.

Excerpted from The Weyrs of Earth by Remus John Lupin, published 2040.

Author's Notes and Mockeries:

- This one is a major mockery. Will you people please stop reading hidden meanings into stuff? I mean come on, we say we don't write smut so people then point out that some of the dragon names are somewhat suggestive if you drop a few letters, change their order and then add an AKI to it. I mean really the names came from an online dragon name generator. If you think to see something in a name that you shouldn't, your seeing things. And to the guy who said the names contained old Soviet Nuclear missile launch codes. No, just no... (walks away shaking his head.)

- ubetiburn, sorry, but Eppy the House elf isn't ours to play with. Besides, last I heard she was off directly an all male porno with Dumbledore and Voldemort.

- Dragonstorm316, I don't know what scares me more, your FOCKING spelling (his spelling, not ours) or the fact that you're letting an 11yr old read our disclaimers. That's scary, kinda like Wednesday Addams meets the Playboy channel.

- To all those people that are begging for Harry to burn down Privet drive with Dragons. What part of maintaining secrecy is escaping you? The Dursleys will be dealt with in the same manner as Voldemort got dealt with.

- Hufflepuff with a tardis, Seriously dude, can you make your name any longer? I aged a full year typing that. But anyway yeah I can see

dragons being excited by a rider giving birth. But come on, most of our riders aren't even 17 yet. I do have plans for seeing some of those aspects of Weyr life, but not for a few years still.

- BJH, do I look stupid? The last time I portrayed Ginny in a good light I nearly ended up abandoning a story because of all the hate mail and death threats. We MIGHT see her again, but by the time we do, Harry will be firmly taken. There is no way there will be any Harry/Ginny shipping here. That ship was sunk.

- Shannon Dee, we'll see your Mutant Gophers and raise you a breeding pair of Mutant Emus. Be afraid.

- It is amazing how many people cut their teeth on stories like Dragonflight in their teens. Ms McCaffrey opened up view onto an amazing world and it makes us feel all tingly inside knowing that others feel that way. Or maybe its the drugs we're taking. Nevermind.

- Regrettably there are no plans to fight the IRS. Something, like old age, the borg and the IRS are enemies you can't beat.

- Motivations behind why people are doing things is not always obvious to you, but generally speaking things do eventually get explained.

- Harry's injury was temporary. We're not planning on crippling him anytime soon. But some of you, no promises.

- Gadriam, yes the girls are patient. But I'll remind you that most of them are GIRLS, teenage, not even 16 for most of them. So at this stage they are more bark than bite.

- Chibi-Kaz, you're missing the point. There won't be a Weyr woman in these Weyrs. Someday there might be a Weyrleader that's female, but she won't be a Weyr woman in the Pern sense.

Standard Disclaimer:

Alyx slammed the file down on Bob's desk. "HERE!" she bellowed.

Bob looked up in surprise. "What's got your panties in a bunch?"

She looked at him blankly and shook her head. She cupped a hand behind her ear and shook her head again.

"So you're deaf then? You've been playing with that jet engine again? I told you that a jet powered vibrator was a bad idea."

Alyx looked at him and shook her head again.

Bob grinned and turned to the audience. "I am so going to enjoy this. Peace and quiet and I can make fun of her all I want. I won't even have to fight with her over who's going to tell you we don't own Harry Potter or the Dragon Riders of Pern!"

Bob turned back to Alyx and said. "Did I ever tell you that I hate it when you bring cookies to bed, you get crumbs in the bed and while I can live with that, when you fart, you blow all the crumbs to my side of the bed."

Alyx glared at him and shook her head.

"And when you get up you look like had a bunch of squirrels climb onto your head and die!"

Alyx glared harder at him and shook her head.

Bob started to laugh. "Did you."

Alyx pulled a baseball bat out of her back pocket and she whacked Bob in the head with it. He collapsed to the ground in a heap. "I READ LIPS ASSHOLE!" she shouted, then she turned to the audience. "ENJOY THE CHAPTER!"

How magical is a dragon? It's common knowledge that dragons are highly resistant to magical spells and their scales makes them resistant to projectile spells. It wasn't until the 15th century and the invention of a pain causing spell that dragons became more manageable. Even today it takes many wizards to subdue a dragon

and bend them to our will. But being superior to dragons we have always managed to control the beasts.

Excerpt from *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find them* by Newt Scamander. Published 1927.

Campbeltown Infirmary, March 28th...

Sirius awoke to an unusual sound. Groggy still from sleep, he looked around for a moment until his eyes came to rest on another form in a bed at the far side of the room. He frowned, noticing the platinum blond hair. He couldn't think of a single female in the Weyr with that color hair. He could think of only one person he knew, someone he'd never trust, with hair that white-blond color.

Slipping out of bed, he padded over to the bathroom to perform his morning ritual and get dressed. Today was the day he was supposed to be cut free from this place. While he had stayed a little longer than people expected, he was ready to face the world again, including a rather svelte British Army Captain who wanted to date him.

Stepping from the bathroom a bit later, he looked at the figure on the bed and had to admit that he knew her. Denial could be fun, but served no purpose when it came to her. Why she was there was a mystery he intended to solve.

He walked over to the bed she was facing and sat on it. She lay on her side, tears slowly sliding down her cheeks.

Her eyes widened and she wiped at them so she could see him better. Her hand moved quickly, then she froze. She'd forgotten for a moment that she'd been disarmed, whereas Sirius was twirling his wand like a cheerleader at a baton competition. It was an old habit he had picked up when he ran with Potter and the Werewolf. It was also a habit that drove her up a wall. She felt he shouldn't treat his wand with such callous disrespect.

"Of all the people I thought I might meet here, I never expected to see my dear cousin Narcissa," he said dryly.

"Sirius, you have to help me. They took away my wand!" she hissed.

Sirius smirked. "Perhaps you don't deserve a wand. I mean, a marked Death Eater like yourself? I'd take away your wand to, and probably break both your legs while I was at it. May I remind you, cousin, you knew all along that I never betrayed the Potters? With that information firmly in mind, I'm sure you'll understand when I say that I'm going to give you the same amount of help you gave me. None."

"Sirius, please. My husband is dead. They took all his money away before they killed him and blamed me for his death. My own son doesn't want to have anything to do with me," she pleaded.

He sighed and shook his head. "Cissy, you're surrounded by dragons, muggles and only a handful of pure blood wizards. The remaining wizards are either half blood, first born, or half breeds. If you want to find shelter here, take your self-righteous beliefs and flush them. If you can take a hard look at your past actions, realize you were wrong, maybe even feel a bit of shame, you might find a place here."

He paused and looked at her harshly. "No one here is going to serve you. No one is going to cater to your whims. No one cares about your opinions or agrees that you have rights due to your birth status – something you didn't earn or work for. You don't have a powerful husband anymore to scare people into submission. You're going to have to open your eyes and see things in a new way. Do all that and maybe you'll earn yourself a place in the Weyr."

She closed her eyes and slowly nodded. She had a small money pouch with less than 200 galleons in it, a multi-compartment trunk filled with her clothing, her jewelry and some heirlooms that the goblins had sent over after that idiot Lucius emptied their account. All totaled, she was nearly a pauper, although selling her jewels would net a tidy sum. However, selling them wouldn't be easy, as she was wanted by law enforcement.

"I'll try. That's all I can promise," she whispered. "I have no options left to me."

"No, you don't have any options," Sirius agreed. "But you do have a chance to start over. Now, why don't you get up and we'll go get some breakfast?"

She nodded and sat up. Sirius conjured some tissues, which he handed to her, then he pointed towards the bathroom. "If you need, it's that way."

She nodded and walked over to the bathroom. It took her a bit to figure out how to get the right temperature water in the sink. After she had washed her face, she straightened up and looked at her reflection in the mirror. It struck her as odd that the mirror wasn't offering any advice to her until she realized it was a muggle mirror.

It was at that moment she finally understood. Life as she knew it was about to take a major shift and she could either let it destroy her or adapt.

"I am a Black and a Malfoy and nothing life throws at me can destroy me," she whispered fiercely to herself.

Then she turned and left to rejoin Sirius. It wasn't going to be easy, but she was going to try to find a way to fit in.

Campbeltown Kitchen Hall, March 28th...

Harry looked up from his notepad when the door opened and Sirius entered, followed by Narcissa. He watched Sirius carefully, noting the way he walked slowly and a bit gingerly, as if still in pain. Katherine Atkins stood from her seat and walked over to him.

He gave her a weak smile. "I can't continue to lay about all day, can I? There are pranks to plan, maybe even a date or two. I also have to check on the air patrols," he added lamely.

Katherine smiled at him and Harry marveled at the change in her. All this time she had impressed him with her stoic exterior, but now she was showing a lot of emotion. She reached out and tugged lightly on Sirius' arm and he let himself be led toward a chair.

Harry watched them for a moment longer, then he turned his attention to Narcissa, who stood by the door, looking very uncertain of herself.

"Mrs. Malfoy, I'm afraid you caught us in the middle of our morning council meeting. If you'll help yourself to some food and drink, I'll get

around to introducing you to the others in a few minutes," Harry said, pointing to the buffet table where the food were kept.

She glanced over and saw Katherine was already putting together a plate, probably for Sirius. So she walked over to the table to help herself.

Harry turned back to the others. "Remus, I understand you want to turn over our guest to Captain Atkins or just obliviate him and set him free?"

Remus looked up and nodded. "I've spoken with him several times, and to be honest, I don't think we can gain anything from trying to get him to answer questions. He has said enough to confirm he's under powerful vows and that he works for the Ministry. Forcing him to talk may kill him. And then there's Luna to consider."

Harry smiled. He had a very brief flash of a nicely shaped blond in a bikini. Since that day in the Hatching Weyr, he had been forced to reconsider his opinions of several people, Luna among them. He shook his head and concentrated on what Remus was saying.

"I don't think she's serious when she talks about feeding him to her dragon, but it's hard to tell with her. Frankly, Harry, the biggest problem is that he's a drain on our resources. I think we should just obliviate him and cut him loose."

Harry nodded and looked out the window for a moment. "Spath?"

"Weyrleader?"

"You know about this man that hurt Smelly Dog?"

"I know, Weyrleader, and I can feel he troubles you. Wolf gives you good advise. There is a time to punish and a time to show mercy."

He grimaced and turned back to Remus. "You mentioned that Luna thinks that her father's occlumency technique fatally injured him?"

"Right," he replied. "Technically, it's not occlumency that the Lovegoods perform. If I had to guess, it's a family trait that results in being dangerous to anyone trying to attack them mentally."

Harry glanced over to Captain Atkins. "If we turn him over to you, you'd have to involve some sort of court, military or otherwise. We'd risk exposing ourselves before we're ready."

"That's right, Harry," replied Katherine.

He turned back to Remus. "Obliviate him and cut him loose. Today, if you can. Let him have his portkey back, but keep his wands. Have a dragon drop him somewhere down in... oh, say, Cornwall, and make him forget about us."

Remus nodded and Harry checked off a line on his notepad.

"James?"

James looked up and then nodded to Karen Khan. "I've been concentrating on our government issues, Harry, but I've asked Karen to help me with the books, so I'll ask her to report on that."

Harry blinked, then he smiled at her. "Karen?"

She blushed, then stood from her seat. It was the first time she was actively participating in the council. "We've had a number of expenditures, including forty thousand pounds for two greenhouses and gardening supplies. We also had large capital purchases of several vehicles, including a small mini bus, two pickup trucks and a small lorry. Tack on another five thousand pounds in basic items such as clothing, sanitary supplies, books, electronics for the social hall and so on. That brought our total expenses to just shy of one hundred and forty six thousand pounds.

"On the plus side, we currently have balance of one million eight hundred and forty two thousand pounds in our account, all of which stems from our production of SDTS. Right now, the income bounces around a lot, but Sir Robert tells me that it won't be long before we'll be asked to produce a steady supply of the SDTS."

"I liked Hot Rocks," muttered Sirius.

Harry shot his godfather a grin, then turned back to Karen. "So, we're all right on money? What about the food herds?"

"I've split up the herds," James said. "We currently have enough, but I've separated them so that some will be spending a bulk of their time breeding and grazing. I'm also working with Karen to find a buyer for the wool we'll have. We'll periodically cull the breeding herds, bringing them to the Weyr to add to the food herd."

"Thank you both" Harry said. When James held up a hand, he paused. "Something else?"

"I have two more issues to bring up and then I'm done."

Harry motioned for him to continue.

"First off, I received notice from the Prime Minister's office. He'd like to see Sir Robert, Albus and myself tonight. Another one of those hush hush meetings, as it were. I don't know what the meeting is about. When I do, I'll let you know, if I can.

"And finally, I really think we need to consider setting up a personal stipend or salary for the members of the Weyr. The simple fact is, I've had to handle purchases of items like music, clothing and some really personal items for some of our riders. It would be easier for Karen and I if they had their own spending money to take care of their personal needs. In short, the riders need to earn a wage."

"Salaries?" murmured Harry in astonishment. "I don't know."

James opened a folder and he quickly leafed through it. Finding the printout he was looking for he gave it to Harry.

Harry glanced down at the purchases and grimaced. "I...uh...oh! Um, well, all right." Realizing he was stammering, he took a deep breath. "I'll get some of the riders together and kick this around. Maybe we can come up with something."

See that he was out of his element, James smiled at him sympathetically.

"Wait! What was that you showed Harry?" demanded Sirius. "I think we should know what caused him to change his mind so quickly."

James slid the paper over to Sirius.

Katherine read it over his shoulder and immediately started chuckling. Just over half of the riders were girls and it seemed that each of them had their own personal preferences when it came to feminine hygiene products and bath items. The next most popular items were music and videos for the social hall.

Sirius slid the paper back to James and he looked at Harry. "Good idea. Let them work it out," he muttered, blushing almost as brightly as Harry.

"Albus, how are classes going?"

"Surprisingly well, my boy. The muggle instructors all arrive via bus at 1pm and are driven directly to one of the furthest buildings away from the Weyr complex. The dragons all know that they should be inconspicuous when they are arriving and leaving. As far as I can tell, they have completely bought into the story that Captain Atkins gave them about teaching the children of base members. They simply believe they are teaching the children of military members who are working on something secret."

"Excellent," Harry replied, then he glanced down at his list. "I'm at the end of my list for today, so if no one has any objections, I'll introduce you all to Mrs. Narcissa Malfoy, Draco's mother. We learned the other day that the Ministry was trying to arrest her for the murder of her husband. Draco assured me that such a thing simply wasn't possible with the magical marriage vows used by his family."

Harry's expression darkened slightly. "Mrs. Malfoy is a witch, but she does not have a wand. We all know what kind of life Draco grew up with and we've seen him struggling at times to get past that. I would hope that you each show Mrs. Malfoy the same level of patience and understanding that you've shown Draco."

"Excuse me, but could someone explain what this place is and what goes on here?" asked Narcissa meekly.

"Perhaps it would be best if I explain it to Narcissa," Albus said. "I have the most experience and I believe I can put things into a perspective she can relate to."

Harry nodded, thankful that he didn't have to repeat that discussion again.

As the meeting broke up, Harry stood and made his way out of the hall. Outside, he stopped Sirius and Katherine for a quick moment.

"Sirius, do you know how to enchant items?" he asked intently.

Sirius blinked and looked at him intently, then smiled slowly. "Finally going to start pranking, eh? Yeah, I can enchant stuff. I take it you want me to teach you how?"

Harry nodded. "Please. I have a feeling that it's going to be important."

Sirius clapped him on the shoulder. "I want you to read a couple of chapters in a book I have. For the most part, enchanting isn't difficult once you understand the process. I'll swing by your office with the book later."

Harry nodded. "Thanks, Sirius. I'll see you both later."

Sirius watched him walk away then turned back to Katherine.

"He probably isn't interested in pranks, you know," Katherine said.

"I know," Sirius admitted, then sighed. "I'm sure he's got a good reason for learning how. It's most likely something serious for the Weyr. I'll give him a hand and once he has it down he'll run with it. That's what he's been doing since I've known him. Right now, however, I have a more difficult problem."

"Oh? What's that?"

"Just what does a muggle do on a date?" he asked meekly.

Katherine laughed and looped her arm with his. "Come on, I'll tell you all about it," she said, walking them towards her office.

#10 Downing Street, London, March 28th...

Once again, Lord Mills, Sir Robert and Albus Dumbledore arrived at the Prime Minister's residence under the cover of darkness. They were quickly ushered into a meeting with Prime Minister Major and Ambassador Madison of the United States.

"Ah, gentlemen. Please, come in and make yourselves comfortable. There's tea or coffee if you prefer," Prime Minister Major said from the couch. He waited and watched until they were settled, then he nodded to Ambassador Madison.

"Gentlemen, on behalf of the government of the United States, you have our utmost gratitude and thanks. While our problems are by no means settled, we are on our way to returning true control of the country back to the federal government. And we have you to thank for it," Madison said gravely.

"Perhaps," Sir Robert replied, "but honestly, Ambassador, we were merely the messengers. If anyone deserves your thanks it should be the dragons and Harry Potter."

"Yes, about that," said Madison, turning to the Prime Minister. "My government is wondering if you'd be willing to allow some NASA representatives to visit with the dragons and perhaps run some tests."

"I'm afraid that's not something we can grant," Albus said, "but we will ask them if they will allow it."

Madison blinked and stared at Albus for a moment, then he turned to the Prime Minister. "I was under the impression that this was a government run project. They are occupying a Royal Air Base."

Prime Minister Major smiled tightly. "The dragons are sapient beings, Mister Ambassador. We have looked through our laws very carefully and discovered a rather interesting thing. None of our laws governing civil liberties actually specify they apply only to humans. Her Majesty's government is taking the stand that the dragons have the same rights as any indigenous human tribe in our Commonwealth."

"Mister Ambassador," Sir Robert said, drawing the man's attention. "I'm sure that a delegation would be welcomed, but you need to understand that the dragons, and their leader, have made one thing abundantly clear; they wish to be treated as equals, not as lab rats, servants or employees."

The old scientist paused and scratched his head. "While I doubt that you will ever find a dragon designing automobiles, their abilities continue to astound me. They have an intrinsic understanding of spatial relationships that amazes me. If you want to ask a dragon to intercept a moving object, that dragon will do it using the best possible course. I've tracked dragons while in flight and all I can say is they are the best navigators the world has ever seen. The level of mathematics necessary to perform such feats is astounding. In fact, the only time I have seen a dragon misjudge its flight was when the human rider told the dragon where to fly.

"My point, sir, is a simple one. A dragon can think. A dragon understands the concept of self and can do things we can't do without the aid of machines. They are, by every definition, people worthy of our support and our respect."

Madison stared at the old man for a moment, then he looked away. "I'm sorry," he said. "I guess it's just hard to go from considering only humans to considering something more than human."

"It is," agreed the Prime Minister. "But it's a shift we all need to make. Dragons are merely the tip of the iceberg. We've been told of more than a dozen other races that are also oppressed by the wizards that are sentient."

Madison leaned back on his seat and shook his head. "I didn't realize it was that bad," he murmured.

"There are a number of self aware races, sir," Albus said. "Dragons, goblins, elves, each are unique and present different problems to the wizarding world. Some barely tolerate wizards, while others are effectively enslaved to them."

Madison grimaced in disgust. The concept of slavery was abhorrent to him.

"Gentlemen, if I might, can I safely assume you'll ask young Mr. Potter and the dragons for permission to receive an American delegation?" asked Major.

"I will bring it up at tomorrow's council meeting," James said.

"Excellent. Now, for something a little more tricky. I have briefed Her Majesty personally and I know Sir Robert has spoken to her several times, as well. She has again expressed an interest in meeting with Mr. Potter and his dragons."

"I don't see any problems with that. Just let us know when and where," James said after glancing at the others.

Major nodded and consulted his list. "Mr. Dumbledore, we've heard some disturbing rumors and I would like your input on what you think is happening."

"Of course. Which rumors?"

"This bit with the aurors seems rather strange to me. Have they all truly quit?"

Albus nodded unhappily, "The Ministry always consisted of three unique power bases. Within the Ministry there was an alliance of close cooperation between Magical Law Enforcement and the Department of Mysteries. Then there existed the Office of the Minister, which sometimes worked with those departments and sometimes worked against them.

"The DMLE and the DoM derived their power base from the fact that they controlled a large number of powerful wizards, trained for combat against others. The Office of the Minister's power was based on controlling the treasury.

"The final part of the power structure was the Wizengamot itself, which reserved both the right to make new laws and the right to judge and punish unto themselves."

Albus paused and took a sip from a cup of tea. "Always before, these three groups contested with each other, but were fairly equal. No one group had enough power to topple another, let alone take on the other two.

"What we're seeing today is a result of decades long animosity against the DMLE, which tried to bring many old families to justice following the rise of Voldemort, and before that, Grindelwald. With the approval of the Wizengamot, the DMLE and the DoM had their budgets cut, slowly at first, reducing their personnel over the years

until, ultimately, those departments became too weak to maintain the balance of power."

Albus scowled. "I daresay the Wizengamot has no clue of what they've allowed to happen. But without the DMLE, the Ministry has been able to slide their WDF into the vacuum created by its loss. The office of the Minister has managed to eliminate one of the checks against it and I suspect that soon it will move against the Wizengamot. What I find more troubling is that these moves are far more canny and politically motivated than I would credit the current Minister with. I can't help but wonder if someone behind the scenes is really running the show.

"There are moves afoot which I cannot ascribe to any one person."

Major nodded. Albus' comments were consistent with what his own intelligence analysts had already concluded. "Do you have any idea who could be running things?"

Albus sat for a moment thinking. The most obvious people, Malfoy and former senior Death Eaters, seemed to be out of the picture and he now knew it wasn't being orchestrated by Voldemort.

"There is an possibility, but to be honest, until recently, she was regarded as mostly being a superlative tail grabber. Delores Umbridge is the official in charge of the WDF. Her career in the Ministry has been remarkable, in as much as she has shown an uncanny knack of finding a rising star and attaching herself to them. She would advance her career, and when it looked like the star was beginning to wane, she'd divest herself of any responsibility for the person and find a new star to follow."

"I suppose," he said thoughtfully, "that she could have fooled all of us. My impression of her was always that of someone who preferred to rely on others to advance her career. However, now that I think about it, I suppose that does mean quite a lot of cunning and planning. On the other hand, Cornelius Fudge was an uncanny politician before his election. He was a great disappointment afterward, of course. Everyone, myself included, thought he would have been a better Minister."

Major nodded unhappily. That, too, was something his analysts had suggested. It also raised the ugly possibility that the Ministry was quickly spiraling out of control.

"Gentlemen, I will tell you that we are still not ready to confront the Ministry of Magic. Our time table slipped, I'm afraid, when we loaned people to the Yanks. As it stands, thanks to your efforts, Mr. Dumbledore, we've managed to place protections on a number of critical government offices and government installations."

Albus nodded knowingly. The British government had taken a bunch of muggle born wizards who had been trying to live as muggles and trained them up. But it had taken Dumbledore to teach them the basics of warding so that they could establish wards around vital places in the country.

"Sir," Lord Mills said with a touch of embarrassment, "I realize this is going to sound somewhat strange, but the Weyrleader has tasked me to tell you that the same offer he gave to the goblins applies to you and your government. Dragons will not sit back and be idle while their friends are under attack. Should the need arise, they will come to your aid."

Major had been a politician for most of his life and few things truly surprised him. He stared at Lord Mills for a moment, caught by surprise by the offer, and then he understood. He smiled at the man who was obviously uncomfortable at bearing this kind of message to his own government.

"Her Majesty's government appreciates the offer. Please thank the Weyrleader for me, but tell him that we are confident that we can handle this on our own," he said smoothly. It was typical diplomatic language. Thank the country for the offer and state with confidence that you were capable of dealing with the problem.

"Sir," Sir Robert said warningly, "you might want to take the Weyrleader's offer more seriously."

Major turned to look at his scientific advisor. "Oh? Can you explain yourself, Sir Robert?"

"Harry Potter made the offer because he honestly felt that if it came to a fight, the dragons deserve to be a part of it. The conflict started

as a result of our realizing that dragons were being slaughtered. You may be fighting to wrest back the control the Ministry has taken from you, but the dragons are fighting for their very lives. It would also be wise to look at their abilities, sir, rather than disregard the offer out of hand.

"A single dragon is capable of producing a fire that is hotter than our hottest blast furnaces. You need a nuclear explosion or the surface of the sun to get a hotter flame. They can go Between and be over any place in the world with no warning. Radar will not detect them. The Weyrleader could fill our skies with thousands dragons in a matter of moments.

"Harry Potter, for all of his youth and inexperience, wants to be treated as an equal and he instinctively knows that in order to be treated as an equal, he has to be willing to place himself and his dragons in harms way to aid an ally. It's an act of trust and friendship," Sir Robert finished quietly.

Major glanced at Madison, who had been watching the exchange with great interest. He reached for his tea with a shaking hand and took a sip.

"Well, this is different," he muttered, looking down for a long minute, then he shook from his reverie and looked at Lord Mills. "Please convey my deepest appreciation and thanks to the Weyrleader for his kind offer. I will take the offer and give it every consideration. There are advantages to using dragons that I might not have considered at first."

Lord Mills nodded, relieved that the Prime Minister wasn't going to blow off Harry's offer.

Campbeltown Weyr, March 29th...

"Harry!"

He looked up to see Sirius and Katherine beckoning to him. He frowned and held up a hand, then he glanced down at Comaloth again before turning to Hermione.

"I'm sorry, but until that scale is dealt with, Comaloth is down checked for flight. I refuse to risk a dragon or you when there's a possible problem."

Hermione looked at him and nodded unhappily. Her eyes teared up. She was convinced that she had been negligent with Comaloth.

Harry sighed and did something that he never thought he'd have the guts to do; he pulled her into a hug. "It'll be fine, Hermione. This isn't your fault. You caught it so early that I'm sure in two days you'll be flying again," he said softly.

She sniffed against him and nodded. She heard his words, but his act of hugging her caught her totally by surprise. It felt very nice and she wished it would last longer, but she knew Harry wasn't used to this kind of contact. She released him and stepped back, giving him a very grateful smile.

Harry returned it, then turned to the others. "Riders!" he called, causing everyone to stop their morning inspection.

"Hermione found a cracked scale on Comaloth. Its location made it a very tricky thing to spot. Make sure you check the areas under the legs where the legs meet the body," he said firmly. "Comaloth is down checked for flight, but Hermione caught this early enough to prevent a major infection from setting in. If you want, come see it for yourself so you know what to look for."

He smiled again at Hermione to let her know he wasn't holding her responsible in any way. With a small wave he turned to walk over to Sirius and Katherine. He didn't see the envious looks shot at Hermione when he turned his back.

Hermione did see them, however, and knew that she'd be under the microscope in the Social Hall tonight.

"What's up?" asked Harry.

"Two things," Katherine said. "I ordered those items you wanted, but I want your promise that you'll be very careful with them. They have very few legal uses in this country."

When Harry nodded without replying, Katherine looked unsatisfied with his response, but she plowed ahead anyway. "The second thing is we have two people at the gates who are asking to speak to the Dragon Master."

Harry looked up sharply. "Wizards?"

"If they're wizards, they're unlike any wizard I've ever met," Sirius murmured.

Harry sighed. "Very well. Let's go see these visitors."

Katherine nodded and led them to the Humvee she used to get around the Weyr. A short ride later, they left the vehicle and entered the small building that was positioned right next to the main gate. Katherine ushered them into a room that contained a large glass panel that allowed them to view the room next door.

When Harry shot Katherine a curious look, she shrugged. "They can't see us or hear us here," she muttered.

Harry stepped closer to the window. Inside was an ancient looking man who was clearly blind. He held a gnarled stick in his hands and from the wearing on it, it looked as though he'd been using it for decades. The second person with him was a young boy, perhaps around Harry's age, but he couldn't be certain. Both were bald and dressed in orange robes.

Suddenly the old man turned to face the mirror and he smiled broadly.

"I don't think this room is as soundproof as you might hope," Harry murmured, noting Katherine's look of dismay.

Harry turned to Sirius. "Let's get Albus here. I think they're wizards," he said, then he turned to the door next to the one way glass and opened it.

He stepped inside, followed by Katherine, who was frowning at Harry for disrupting her security measures.

The old man said something and the young boy jumped to his feet. "Namaste," he said, clasping his hands together and bowing slightly. "Are one of you the Dragon Master?" he asked in accented English.

"I am the Weyrleader," Harry said softly.

The boy said something to the old man, then he bowed so low as to nearly prostrate himself before Harry. "Honored Lord Dragon Master, we have spent many days traveling here to seek your guidance."

Harry gaped at the boy, who still bowed low before him. "Let's back up a bit and start with introducing yourselves," he said with a sinking feeling. "And please, get up. You need not bow to me."

The boy climbed to his feet and looked at Harry gratefully. Behind him he could hear the door open and close again and he could only assume that Sirius had returned with Albus.

"I am Lobsang, lowly and unworthy apprentice to Master Jangbu. Master Jangbu was the chief dragon handler at our Maziang reserve in Tibet. When the dragons revolted at the other reserves, many nations tried to buy or force their way into ours. We also found some new dragons that just appeared in our reserve and we do not understand where they came from."

The old man spoke again in his language and the boy nodded fervently to him. "Master Jangbu meditated for two weeks on the problem. Our reserve does not kill dragons and we have tried to take care of them. Dragons were always before, easy for us to control, but that changed and we didn't understand why. Then the master decided that the dragons finally have a leader and we must seek him out."

"Well, that's something you don't hear everyday," muttered Sirius.

"Indeed," replied Albus.

"Who leads the Maziang Weyr?" Harry said mostly to himself.

"Master Jangbu leads us, honored Dragon Master," the boy replied, looking confused.

Harry blinked and shook his head. "No, I meant which dragon."

Harry's eyes glazed over and the others fell into a respectful silence, "Who leads the Weyr known as Maziang?" he sent.

"I do," came a startled reply. "I am Nokrenth, senior male of Maziang."

"Please come to Campbeltown, Nokrenth. Bespeak to Spath and get the jump imagery. We have two wizards who claim to be from Maziang," Harry replied, then turned back to his two guests. He could hear Spath speaking to the distant dragon, giving him the imagery he needed to jump Between.

"I have summoned your senior dragon to come here," he said softly. "In the meantime, I would invite you two to visit our Weyr."

"Harry," Sirius said guardedly, "are you sure this is a good idea?"

"Sirius, the Tibetan reserve was the only one in the world that didn't cull dragons for potion ingredients and heartstrings," he said tensely. "That alone earns them the right to be heard."

Lobsang spoke to his master for a moment and then the older man replied in a hard tone. Lobsang turned to Harry and prostrated himself again. "My master wants me to thank you, Lord. He knows you do not have to listen to us."

Harry blanched and bent over, picking up Lobsang and placing him on his feet again. "Please do not bow to me. Let's all go over to one of the other buildings where we can be comfortable and talk about this. I've asked your senior dragon to come here and he should be there by the time we arrive."

After a short ride they were all standing in Hangar Two. Lobsang's eyes roamed around, taking in the Weyrling classes still working on their inspections, although some had moved on to oiling down their dragons already.

He spoke rapidly to Jangbu and the old man seemed to smile in satisfaction, then he said something to Lobsang. "My master says it warms his heart and makes him envious. You care for your dragons and they allow you close contact. We cared for our dragons but they are more like wild beasts who we could not touch."

Harry motioned for the two men to sit and Dobby appeared with a tea service. "I hope our kind of tea is satisfactory," he said.

Lobsang grinned and poured a cup, which he placed in his Master's hands. "It has been a long trip, but when one sits many hours onboard an airplane, you learn to accept the tea, poor though it might be."

The doors to the hangar opened and Chekiath and Spath led in an older looking Ukrainian Ironbelly. Lobsang sucked in a deep breath and spoke quietly to Jangbu. They easily recognized the dragon from their reserve.

The three dragons approached the group.

Nokrenth looked at the pair, then turned to Harry. "I had wondered where these two had gone, Weyrleader," he said.

"He speaks!" gasped Lobsang.

Jangbu reached for Lobsang's arm and spoke rapidly. The boy listened for a moment, then he placed a hand on the older man's hand, patting him before turning back to Harry with a plea in his eyes. "Please, how is it the dragons can speak? Can you teach us this spell? We will give anything we have to be able to talk with the dragons in our care."

Harry smiled at Lobsang, "My friend, there is no spell to learn. But give me a few moments to figure out what is happening."

Lobsang nodded, looking confused and anxious.

Harry turned to Nokrenth. "How is it they do not know you can talk?"

"Blind Eyes is a kindly human, Weyrleader, but we had heard from the other Weyrs that speaking to his kind would do no good. The dragon handlers ignored us elsewhere, and since they never tried to kill any of us, we never felt a need to speak to them. When Blind Eyes vanished, we were worried that they were bringing in more handlers, the evil handlers," Nokrenth said. "We know how lucky we are compared to others and did not want to risk changing that. We

talked it over and knew that you would bring us riders, so we decided to wait."

"No!" gasped Lobsang. "To know that you think and speak is wondrous! We would never hurt a dragon."

The old man said something and Nokrenth turned to him. "I am sorry. We didn't know," replied Nokrenth.

"Amazing," Albus murmured. "Apparently the dragons can understand any human, regardless of language. But when he talks, he speaks in English to us. I bet our new friends hear their own language when the dragon speaks."

Harry nodded and watched as the old man shuffled forwards a few steps. Nokrenth stretched out his long neck and the old man touched him. His smile grew huge and his sightless eyes streamed tears. He had spent his entire life among dragons, caring for them, but had never touched a living dragon before.

Harry stepped back and a smile spread over his face.

"What are you grinning about?" asked Sirius.

"I think we're looking at the birth of our second real Weyr, Siri," he replied. "Lobsang is young enough to impress and they already have a population of people to draw upon for their rider candidates." He turned to the young man. "Do all the dragon handlers at Maziang feel like you do, Lobsang?"

The boy turned to him and nodded. "We believe it is a sin to harm a living creature as magnificent as dragons. We are a poor reserve because we live off of the products we can collect without killing dragons. Dragon dung, scales made into decorative jewelry, that sort of thing. We also grow our own food for our community and for our dragons. Dragons have always been revered by my culture. We have myths of dragons going back many centuries. We would not, could not, resort to killing dragons like so many other reserves would."

"How many handlers are there?" asked Sirius out of curiosity.

"Our village has nearly three hundred people, but less than 40 are dragon handlers."

"The humans of Maziang never hurt any of us, Weyrleader, although once in a while one of us would pass on and they would use the carcass for their purposes. That was during the age of beasts," Nokrenth added. "The boy and others like him at the Weyr could be riders, but we were afraid that talking to them would bring us the angry handlers, so we never reached out to them."

"Can't blame them for that, Harry. Not when they didn't know," Sirius said quietly.

"I don't, Siri. The more I hear about them, the more I like what I'm hearing."

Harry turned to the dragon. "Nokrenth, would you prefer things to remain as they are, or do you want to work to make Maziang into a true Weyr?"

Nokrenth turned to look at Harry, his eyes whirling with streaks of blue. "You would allow us to become a real Weyr?"

"My friend, I wouldn't dream of denying you. If you and your clan want real riders and are willing to work with Jangbu and his people, you could see your first riders in less than a year. There will be some limitations, but I don't think you'll find them to be hard to follow."

There was a moment of shocked silence, then every dragon in the large room bellowed and trumpeted joyously, causing everyone to cover their ears.

"My Weyrleader, my rider!" shouted Chekiath and Harry blushed. His dragon was bouncing on his front feet and trumpeting loudly.

The two Tibetan dragon handlers were thoroughly confused and Harry stepped up to Lobsang, who was gazing around at all the dragons.

"I don't understand," protested Lobsang.

Harry smiled and gripped the boy's shoulder. He waved his hand, encompassing the riders who were smiling at him. Behind each of them was their dragon. He glanced at Nokrenth, who bobbed his head in acknowledgment of the silent request. He would pass the Weyrleader's comments to the old man.

"Lobsang, each of these people before you have a bond with their dragon. They are connected at a deep, personal level, each to the other. It is a deeper relationship than anything you now have at Maziang. But you could have this sort of relationship. You, too, could become a dragon rider.

"Talk to some of our riders. Talk to the dragons. Learn what we're doing here and learn why it's so important, Lobsang. See what you could have."

The young boy stared at Harry for a moment, then he turned to his master, who had yet to release Nokrenth. The old man waved him away with a quick word, then he went back to talking to Nokrenth.

Lobsang stepped forward uncertainly and Luna came up to meet him.

"Let me introduce you to Trandieth, my dragon. Being from Tibet, I have to ask. Have you seen any Snorkacks?" she said, pulling him forward.

Harry turned to the others. "Let's put together some dragon rider kits and books so they can take them home. Nokrenth can take them back quicker than flying British Airways."

"What limitations would you impose on them, Harry?" asked Albus, curious.

Harry looked at the old man and smiled. "Nothing too major. Time Travel is forbidden, of course, and to be kept secret. They'll need to use our Birthing Weyr for their first impression. Hot rock production will be channeled through this Weyr only. We'll act as a clearinghouse for the SDTS and see that each Weyr receives a just portion of the proceeds from those sales."

Albus nodded thoughtfully. "It makes sense, and using the Birthing Weyr means that all of the hatchlings will have the same basic training."

Harry nodded. "I think we should expect to keep our guests for a few days so we can fill them in on all the details of the Weyrs."

"I'll talk to Dobby about setting up some guest quarters," Sirius offered.

He nodded again and watched as the two dragon handlers conversed with dragons for the first time in their lives.

Campbeltown Social hall, that evening...

Hermione stepped into the hall and went straight to the large tea pot that Dobby maintained for everyone. She poured herself a cup of tea and looked around. May and bunch of the girls were all sitting around a table chatting and working on their homework.

The boys were at another table, pretty much doing the same thing. It was unusual, but the group of teens tended to work together on their studies for several hours before putting that away and mixing socially.

Susan Bones waved her over to their table and she walked over and sat down, joining Susan, Luna, May and Mariah.

"So?" Susan said with a broad grin. "Need a hug?"

Hermione smiled at the gentle tease. "You're not really my type, Sue, and I don't see Harry here."

"So, all we need to do to get a hug is find a cracked scale?" asked Mariah teasingly.

Hermione instantly sobered and shook her head. "No," she replied firmly. "Do you remember when Harry told us about how he once overextended Chekiath and how awful he felt about it?"

The girls nodded, a bit surprised by the sudden serious turn of the conversation.

"I remember thinking, so they spent some time on a beach while Chekiath rested, no real big deal. I didn't realize it then, but I know now. Harry felt terrible. He felt like he had let his dragon down. I found that scale and I was appalled. My Comaloth was in trouble and I didn't know about it, hadn't noticed it, had let it happen."

She paused and looked at the girls, who were staring at her in shock. "I was sure I was a terrible rider. I'd allowed my dragon to be hurt through inattention. Harry knew immediately what I was thinking. He pulled me into that hug and told me it wasn't my fault. He told me I had caught it early enough that there was no infection to treat yet. He cut through the guilt I was inflicting on myself. I won't say it's entirely gone but at that moment I knew that bad scales just happen. I caught it early enough and there was no need for guilt."

"You're perfect for me," Comaloth said privately and she blushed slightly.

"And I feel the same about you, Coma," she replied. "But I need to make the girls understand."

"I also realized that Harry put aside his own feelings to comfort me," she finished softly.

"And she learned that a hug from Harry was just wonderful," Luna added, causing most of the girls to chuckle.

Hermione's blush deepened but she didn't refute the statement.

Conversation ceased as Harry walked in and all eyes tracked him as he went to get a drink. Walking to a table, he all but fell into a chair.

Hermione frowned, got up from her seat and walked over to where he sat. A moment later, May, Susan and several other girls followed her.

"Something wrong, Harry?" asked Hermione.

"One second," he replied, then he pulled out his ever present notebook and made a note in it, then he turned back to Hermione. "I'm sorry, it's just that lately it seems that every time one issue is solved, two pop up to take its place. Lobsang and Master Jangbu

will be staying with us for a few days before returning to their Weyr with what they've learned.

"In the meantime, I haven't heard back from the Goblins and I had to extend the same offer to our British hosts, plus I had to figure out a way for us to fight from dragon back without relying on dragon fire. Just after dinner, Lord Mills reminded me I'm supposed to figure out what to pay our dragon riders and other people in the Weyr."

Susan looked confused. "We can't we just use our wands in a fight?"

May poked her in the ribs and Susan yipped and glared at the girl.

"Some of us don't have wands," May said.

"That's right, some don't. But I started thinking that if we need to fight from the backs of our dragons it had to be something that wouldn't interfere with their ability to fly, and preferably something that can be non-lethal when we want it to be," Harry said. "I really don't want to kill if we can avoid it."

Mariah shivered in her seat. "I don't like the idea of fighting anyone," she murmured.

Harry nodded. "Nor do I, but we're fighting for our dragons lives here, Mariah. There's nothing to worry about at the moment, though. I'm just planning for a future that may not happen."

She nodded, still unhappy with the idea.

"No, my biggest concern right now is figuring out how much everyone should be paid," Harry said.

The five girls exchanged a look.

"How about if we work on some ideas for that? We can present our results to you when we're done," Hermione told him.

Harry nodded gratefully, "That would be great. I have no clue how to go about figuring that stuff out. I thought about asking everyone, but I realized all that was going to do was end up with thirty some odd opinions of what they thought they should be making."

"What brought this up?" asked Mariah. "I mean, we don't pay rent and food is free. What happened that brought this about."

Harry grinned and shook his head. "If you really want to know why, talk to Karen. It's not a subject I'm all that comfortable with, but I've been assured it's necessary."

Hermione reached out and patted his arm. "We'll handle it, Harry, don't you worry. Hopefully we'll have something for you in a few days."

Harry nodded, then he noticed Sirius waving to him from the doorway. "Sorry, duty calls again, I see," he muttered, then he rose and left them.

The five girls watched him leave with Sirius, then Susan looked around and spotted Karen working on her notes at another table. She stood and walked over to the girl and talked to her for a few minutes before returning to the table with a bit of a smirk.

"Well?" pressed May.

"Apparently, we're the reason for the need for a payroll. According to Karen, it's only been two months and some of our requests for purchases have been making Lord Mills uncomfortable. He feels we should be able to have enough money so that we can buy our own bath products and other things for that time of the month."

"And they told that to Harry?" exclaimed May, "I'm surprised he didn't explode from embarrassment."

Susan giggled, "He did."

And that caused all five girls to laugh. Boys were such wimps sometimes!

Campbeltown Weyr, Kitchen Hall, April 1st...

Narcissa wandered into the hall in the hopes of finding some tea. The past few days had been eye opener. She quickly helped herself and found a seat at an empty table. The newspaper at the table was a muggle newspaper and out of curiosity she started flipping through the pages. So little of it made any sense to her.

"Confusing, isn't it?"

She looked up to see Sir Robert standing there, his arms full of papers, his ever present thermal bottle and a cup of tea. "May I?" he asked.

She blinked and nodded. "Please," she replied.

"We haven't been formally introduced. I am Sir Robert March, chief government scientific advisor and lead scientist here at the Weyr for the British government," said Sir Robert, offering his hand.

Narcissa looked at him in surprise for a moment. The man looked very old and she never imagined she'd meet a knighted muggle. She didn't even know such a thing existed. "Narcissa Malfoy," she murmured, shaking the offered and hand wondering if Salazar was turning over in his grave right about now.

Sir Robert smiled at her, then took a sip of his tea. "I can sympathize, my dear. I know next to nothing about magic, which violates everything I've ever believed in, and yet it clearly exists. You are now surrounded by people and technology, It must be all very overwhelming for you."

"It doesn't help that no one really trusts me," she replied a bit bitterly. "Even my own son."

Sir Robert nodded. "Yes, it is difficult, but you can come back from that position. I don't know how much you know muggle history, my dear, but are you perhaps familiar with World War II?"

Narcissa shook her head.

Sir Robert smiled ruefully. "Terrible business, just terrible. We had a war that spanned the globe and killed millions on both sides. Two of our greatest enemies in that war, Germany and Japan, are now two of our greatest economic partners. It didn't happen overnight, but it happened nonetheless. Right now we on the verge of discoveries that will usher in a new era and you have a chance to be part of that."

Narcissa smiled thinly, but a part of what Sir Robert was saying managed to penetrate through her wizard brain. "New era? Whatever are you talking about?"

Sir Robert waved a hand to encompass their surroundings. "I know this all looks rather drab and dreary but that's today. This is all going to change..."

He spoke at length and quite a lot of what he said went over her head entirely, but one concept shone through that fired her imagination. Power. It was all about power. Right now things were in their infancy, but soon dragons and their riders would be a source of power unlike any she had ever dreamed of.

If she was willing to put aside her attitude and her opinions, she might be able to enjoy some of the fall out from that power. It was the reason she married Lucius, and the reason why she took the dark mark. They were both paths to power. Now the dragons represented a different kind of power, but it was still power.

For power, she'd do anything, including bury her bigotry.

Campbeltown Weyr...

"Harry, Garanoth says that Ronan would like you to join him at the end of Runway twenty nine." Chekiath said.

Campbeltown had one very long runway, and depending on the direction, it was either runway twenty nine or runway eleven. Depending upon the direction you were facing, the runway was either one hundred and ten degrees or two hundred and ninety degrees off north. Aircraft personnel tended to drop that last zero, hence the twenty nine or eleven notation.

Harry looked up from his book and blinked in surprise, then he smiled. He could use a break from studying. Weyr business cut into his study time so whenever he had a few moment, he turned to his books.

Standing, he turned to his dragon. "Want to come along?"

"I just might. Garanoth says it's a strange thing."

Harry nodded and walked over to Chekiath's exit. He didn't have the weight to activate the door, but Chekiath easily activated it with one foot, lifting the entire wall. He stepped out into the street outside and waited for Chekiath to follow, then he mounted Chekiath and they sprang aloft.

Harry's Weyr was close to the main administration building, so it was quite a walk. They didn't need to lift or fly far, just to the end of the single runway.

Chekiath landed not far from Garanoth, who bugled a welcome to the pair. Harry slid down from his position on Chekiath and walked over to where Ronan knelt. He had a small scale model airplane that looked like a RAF World War II era Spitfire. Not far from that was a small World War II style jeep.

Ronan looked up and grinned. "I wrote my Dad about sending my main plane and my trainer, but my little brother wrecked the trainer on me," he said. "So Dad sent along the RC jeep. He suggests trying that out, and if you like it, then consider buying a trainer for yourself."

Harry looked down at Ronan's Spitfire with interest. "What's the difference between this and a trainer?"

"Well, this is more expensive. It's also faster. If you crash one of these you can really wreck it badly. Most trainers are designed to be crashed. The idea is to get you used to flying using the trainer before you move into a better airplane. My Dad made me use a trainer for months. You should see the planes he has. He has a scale model Lancaster bomber that's awesome and huge!"

Ronan looked down and picked up a control unit. "Here, take this. There's a power switch on the jeep, then throw the power on the controller and you're ready to go."

Harry looked at the controller in his hands with two joysticks and a single switch. Compared to the one Ronan had, with its extra knobs and dials, it looked really simple. Harry failed to suppress a grin as he walked over to the small jeep.

The closest thing he had gotten to playing with any kind of trucks or cars as a child was a three wheeled truck that Dudley had broken

and thrown away. And Vernon took that away from him when he discovered Harry hiding it a few days later.

It wasn't long before he was sitting on the ground watching the jeep zip around the tarmac, while Ronan's Spitfire swooped and dove overhead. The two dragons seemed highly amused by the little toys.

After a while, Ronan called Harry over and carefully explained the controls to him, then let him fly the plane for a bit. Harry quickly realized that the highly maneuverable airplane was harder to fly than it looked.

He grinned at Ronan and passed him back the controller. "I've got to get one of these," he said with a laugh.

Ronan echoed his smile. "I'll write Dad and ask him to get a few catalogs to send you. Just don't buy anything without first letting me see what you're getting. Doesn't make sense to waste money on the wrong thing."

Harry nodded, then he glanced over at Chekiath, who was following the jeep on the ground. "Maybe we'll get Sirius a jeep, eh, Cheki?"

"Or we just put a bone on the back and watch him chase it," replied Chekiath.

Ronan and Harry both laughed.

For Harry, it felt good to talk to a guy who didn't really care about the Boy-Who-Lived. Ronan simply wanted to share his hobby and was glad of Harry's interest.

Lyneham Village, England, April 3rd...

"Are you sure you won't get in trouble for this, Gordie? I didn't know they'd let you out before basic was over," Mindy said.

Gordon smiled at his girlfriend and caressed her right breast, while he nibbled on her ear. "Oh, yeah. They think I'm doing really well. If I play my cards right I might get a few more holidays like this."

Mindy sighed and cuddled into him for a moment longer, then reached for his belt. Gordon had called an hour earlier to tell her that

he had a few hours off and he was dying to see her. Mindy thought it was a marvelous thing. Normally, her parents are home on Saturdays, but her father took her mother over to Wroughton to see her sick sister.

He wasn't kidding, she thought, he's rock hard and trembling!

Several hours later, Gordon Chapman climbed back on his dragon and took off for the Weyr. Below him, in the town of Lyneham, two people managed to get a silhouetted photo of a dragon with rider in the air over the town.

One person would delete the grainy image. The other would sell it to the London Globe.

Office of the Undersecretary to the Minister for Magic, April 5th...

"Delores," said a voice.

Umbridge flinched and looked up at Cornelius standing in her doorway.

"What's this I heard about you losing some people trying to get into the Department of Mysteries?"

She paled and nodded. "Yes, we lost eight people. Apparently the entire department is filled with lethal traps. At this point, I suspect that even if we did reach the files, we'd find them useless to us. That blasted Croaker must have been planning this move for years."

Fudge nodded knowingly. It would be typical of Croaker. "And your recruitment effort?" he pressed.

She gave him a weak smile. She had better news to report there. "Ah, we are at five hundred and forty three recruited. I expect them to be fully trained by mid May. Once we hit that point, we'll be able to capture the dragons held by the goblins."

With the death of Lucius Malfoy and no sign of Voldemort returning, the pure blood families who had supported his cause were falling over themselves to get involved in the WDF. Lucius hadn't been liked at all, but the fear he generated had held them in check for many years. With him gone, those families were now looking for

ways to insert themselves into positions of power and many felt the WDF was providing that path.

"What about attacking the Wizengamot first?" he asked.

She frowned. "Cornelius, if you want to weaken the Wizengamot, the way to do it is with selective assassinations. Attempting to do a full WDF assault would cut into the numbers we need for Gringotts. There's also the fact that some families can assemble fairly large groups rather quickly. The Flints, for example, can have fifty or sixty people coming to their aid. That sort of fight is bound to cut into our numbers."

Cornelius nodded thoughtfully. "Very well. I'll put together a list of people to weaken the Wizengamot, then we'll deal with them after we're done with the Goblins."

Delores nodded agreeably. There wasn't anything else she could do but agree to his orders.

Campbeltown Weyr, Hangar #2, April 6th...

The riders sat around talking and joking with each other. Harry had been about to start the morning session when he was called away, so they had little else to do until his return. Several took the opportunity to give their dragon a quick inspection, Hermione among them. She still remembered how close she came to a serious problem with Comaloth, so she inspected her dragon daily for potential problems.

Comaloth took it all in stride. She was content and didn't blame Hermione in the least. She was now certified for flight once more and all was right in her world. Hagrid had examined the scale and he trimmed it slightly so that the excess wasn't bulging upwards. Hermione and Comaloth spent the next two days checking and rechecking the spot, but trimming the scale and the two days without going Between saved her from a course of antibiotics.

"Hermione!" hissed May.

She looked up from examining her dragon. "What?"

"Do you know what Harry's up to?"

Hermione shook her head. "No, just that he's been really busy the last few days."

"It probably has something to do with those boxes up at the table," May said with a bit of a pout. Usually between the two of them, they generally knew what Harry was working on. Up at the table on the dais there was a large pile of boxes wrapped in brown paper, so they couldn't see what was in them.

The door to the hangar opened with a bang and Harry stalked in. It was obvious he was beyond furious. He was followed by Sirius, Captain Atkins, Remus, Dumbledore and Lord Mills. A hush fell over those in the hangar as the dragons picked up on Harry's mood.

He walked up to the table and laid down a newspaper on the table. With a flick of his wand, the page expanded to a huge size and flew to the wall behind him where it stuck.

As a group, the riders sucked in a breath. The single grainy photo was captioned "Dragons over our skies or a clever fake?"

The image was grainy and of very poor quality, but it was painfully obvious that someone had taken a photo of a dragon and a rider.

"Which one of you went to Lyneham this past weekend?" Harry asked.

His question was met with silence and everyone looked around at each other.

"Which dragons left here on Saturday?" Harry asked, turning his attention to the dragons.

"I wasn't here," Trath said. "But we were on Weyr business with Selanth."

May started and looked at Harry. "Trath and I went with Hagrid to Lac Logipi to check on their hatchlings. The one that was shot through the leg is still showing some weakness in that leg," she said, cowed by his glare.

Harry nodded with a tight smile. "Anyone else?"

"My rider and I went to the Hatching Weyr, Weyrleader," Olaronth said.

Martin Benson blushed and looked very embarrassed. "I've been getting my jump imagery messed up, so we ran some jumps between the two Weyrs, then used the hot springs for a hour. We didn't go near any populated areas, Harry, I swear."

Harry nodded. "Marty, if you continue to have problems, Remus know a meditation technique that may help you." He knew of the method because Remus had tried to teach him occlumency before he realized that the dragon bond made him immune to legilimency. The technique would help him with his visualizations.

He turned to the others. "Anyone else?"

"I wasn't here, but I do not know the name of the place we went to," Kirteth said. Gordon stared at his dragon incredulously as if he couldn't believe he would betray him.

"Chapman, what did you go to Lyneham for?" Harry asked. The wizards in the group were becoming alarmed over the amount of magic that was bleeding from him.

Chapman mumbled something.

"I can't hear you!" barked Harry. The room began to rumble and the overhead lights started swaying. Multiple dragons bellowed angrily.

The wizards and witches present were surprised by the amount of magic flowing off him, it was enough to cause the air around him to shimmer to their eyes.

"I went to see my girlfriend! There! Happy now? I wanted to see my girlfriend," Chapman shouted, stepping back from Harry. "I spent several hours with her, since her parents weren't home, then I came back here."

Harry closed his eyes and took a deep breath, pushing down his magic. Slowly the rumbling stopped.

"This is not a prison. If you had asked, arrangements could have been made for you to go see her," Harry said tensely. "What you did endangered your dragon and endangered your Weyr!" he snapped, then he took another deep breath.

"If any of you want to go see a girlfriend, boyfriend or family, I'll not stop you, but you need to take precautions. Lyneham has a major RAF air base nearby. What would you have done if an RAF fighter fired on you and your dragon? Can you out fly a missile?"

Chapman looked down at his feet, refusing to look up at Harry. He had forgotten about the air base.

"Captain Atkins?"

"Yes, Harry?"

"Is your Corporal Mitchell still needing help with his refurbishing problems?"

Atkins scowled. Corporal Mitchell was trying to repair the plumbing systems in four out buildings and he had discovered that the septic tanks for all four buildings were clogged. It was a very ugly, messy job that no one wanted to do, not even Corporal Mitchell. She nodded to Harry, unsure what he had in mind.

The buildings were at the extreme edge of the old airbase and he didn't know why they needed to be repaired, except that Sir Robert had expressed some interest in using them.

"Chapman, for the next thirty days you're confined to the Weyr, except in the event of any classes or Weyr activities which might require leaving the Weyr. You'll have two hours a night, from eight to ten, to work on your homework. The remainder of your free time will be spent helping Corporal Mitchell refit and repair the plumbing in the north west buildings," Harry said.

"You can't do that!" shouted the older boy.

"You endangered your dragon and the rest of us!" bellowed Harry, then he calmed slightly. "Use the time spent working with Corporal Mitchell to rethink your place, Chapman. You've been obstructive and difficult since you arrived here. I can't undo your bond, but if I

could, I'd send you home. Since I won't hurt Kirteth, this will have to do. If you need anything from town, ask someone to get it for you. Kirteth, you heard my decision. You are not to take your rider anywhere unless it's for a class or on official Weyr business."

"Yes, Weyrleader," Kirteth said unhappily.

"Someday," Harry said in a firm voice, "the skies will be filled with dragons and the world will know of us, but that day is not today. Until we are ready for the world to know, not a single one of you will endanger our Weyr again!"

Harry turned to Lord Mills. "Lord Mills, please convey to the Prime Minister the Weyr's apology for this security breach and inform him that I have dealt with the issue. There will not be a repeat of it," he said, then he glared at Chapman for a moment before he spun on his heel and walked silently from the hangar, their morning lesson forgotten.

Karen Khan spun on Gordon. "Was it worth it? Was it so important that you had to go get laid and produce that?" she spat, waving towards the photo on the wall.

May looked at Karen, then turned to Gordon who refused to look at anyone. "That's what this is all about? You wanted to get laid? Jesus Christ, Chapman, what kind of idiot are you? You've seen Harry kill to protect us. You've seen him injure himself to protect us. What do you think he's going to do if you risk exposing us before we're ready?"

Chapman had generally fit in with the group, but he considered himself, as the oldest of the riders, the most worldly and most experienced. He thought he was a suave ladies man, although the first time he tried hitting on Luna she'd taught him what a stinging hex could do. After that, he tended to steer clear of the witches in their group.

Usually when he'd show up in the social hall, the non magical girls would move closer to the witches who had offered them some protection from him.

"He could have made you impotent with a single spell," Susan Bones said into the silence.

"Hey, guys, settle down," Sirius said, trying to ease tensions. "It's done and over. Let's work on making sure it doesn't happen again, that's all."

Hermione snorted. "I should think it's obvious. Like Harry said, this isn't a prison. If someone wants to see someone outside the Weyr, they should ask." She looked around and Sirius caught her eye and nodded. "Right then, speak to Sirius to make arrangements. We cannot use our dragons as personal transportation. At least not for this and certainly not yet."

"Mister Chapman, I'll send Corporal Mitchell by later today so he can explain what he needs," Captain Atkins said, then she moved to the table where Harry had a bunch of boxes. "I'll lock these up for now."

Sirius stepped closer and waved his wand, shrinking the boxes down to size and she shot him a grateful look.

"Do you know what's in these boxes?" Sirius asked.

Katherine nodded. "I do. I was supposed to help Harry with them today. He bought weapons for the riders."

"Weapons?" repeated a stunned Sirius.

She shrugged. "It's not as bad as it sounds and he's been working hard to make them as non-lethal as possible. But I was supposed to get some of my people to help introduce them today. I'll lock them up in our armory for now."

Sirius nodded and wondered what the heck Harry was thinking of.

With lessons canceled, the riders filtered out of the building, heading towards the social hall. Hermione and May opted instead to seek out Harry, who they found in his office in the main administration building. Chekiath lay off to one side, but he was rather cramped. They had knocked down the walls to a number of offices to make space for the dragon and he was clearly outgrowing that space.

Hermione and May found Harry staring out a window. From his stance, it was obvious he was still quite angry.

"Harry, are you all right?" asked May.

He sighed and closed his eyes for a moment, then he turned and smiled weakly at her. "Well, it's been an interesting morning so far. The one saving grace from the whole affair that I can see is that the muggles think the photo was faked," he said, then he went to sit at his desk.

"Harry, can we talk to you for a bit? We have some ideas about paying the riders that we'd like to share," Hermione offered.

He nodded and gestured to the chairs in front of his desk. The two girls sat and May reached into her book bag. They were alike in that manner. Both girls had an ever present bag with their text books and other items important to them. The biggest difference was that Hermione's bag was charmed to be featherlight and bottomless, May's bag had only featherlight charm, a gift from Albus, who noted her struggling with the heavy bag one day.

"Each Rider/Dragon pair represent two unique parts who contribute to the Weyr and the working of the Weyr economy. Initially, what we'd like to see is each partner receiving an amount based on their jobs and what they do to contribute to the Weyr in general," Hermione said, then she looked at May.

"It works like this. Each pair makes roughly the same amount of base money. Figure as a guess right now, a thousand pounds per month. We chose that amount for a number of reasons. It's enough that the rider is capable of purchasing a modest personal item, such as a stereo or a heavy winter jacket without having to be broke for the rest of the month. This is still well below average medium income for the country, but unlike the rest of the country, we live in a communal Weyr, which is making a lot of income from the making of the SDTS.

"Hermione and I have also identified other avenues of possible income we haven't explored. For example, transportation. Dragons are capable of moving a group of ten people around the world in less than an hour and there's no jet lag involved," May offered.

"Or some riders might decided to offer vacation tours via dragon back. I can easily see some day a group of riders offering aerial tours of the Amazon, for example," Hermione added. "We can't all sit

around making rocks, and frankly, I think there's a ton of opportunities that we're just starting to look at."

"Each of these side ventures would bring the rider pairs more personal income and a percentage of that would go to the Weyr for maintaining Weyr space, as well as homes for our riders and their families," May continued.

"Families?" asked Harry. What they were talking about bewildered him. He had the vision of dragons being a common sight in the skies of Earth, but he wasn't sure how he was going to get there yet. Now the girls were filling in some of the holes in his vision with ideas and concepts that hadn't occurred to him.

"Honestly, Harry, I don't know about you, but I would like to have a family someday," answered Hermione with some asperity. "I expect that a portion of what I and Comaloth make would go to housing my family and providing an education for my children. I also expect that it would be likely that, at some point, we'd be providing our own riders, for the most part, and bringing in some from searches only to keep us from inbreeding."

Harry looked down for a moment. "I guess I didn't look that far ahead," he said ruefully.

"No, you didn't," agreed May gently so as to not offend him, "You have more important issues to worry about right now. That's why we are here. You deal with what's happening now. We're looking to the future and where we hope to be once you've solved our immediate problems."

Hermione nodded and he was surprised by the confidence they both held for him.

"All right, write this up and we'll get together with James and kick it around. It sounds good to me, but," he trailed off with a shrug. Prices of things like winter coats or stereos was unknown to him, having never owned either of them.

May nodded. She'd already put a lot of this together on a computer in Emma's office. She had also included something they wouldn't mention to Harry until much later. They wanted to make sure Harry

got back at least some of the trust money he'd spent on the herds and the first sets of clothing for the Weyr.

May stood and Hermione reluctantly followed suit. Then they exchanged a look and May nodded. Hermione waited until May left before she turned back to him.

"Harry, what will you do about Chapman?"

He frowned. "There isn't much that I can do, Hermione. He's a bonded rider. Anything I do to him hurts Kirteth and I won't do that. The job I gave him is messy and just maybe humbling enough to make him fall in line. Like I said, this isn't a prison. It's also one of the reasons why I am pushing for the Prime Minister and the government to recognize us as a nation. You can't lock up a dragon rider. We're going to have to develop our own form of justice that doesn't hurt the dragon."

She sat down on the edge of her chair. "There's just so much," she murmured.

Harry ran a hand through his hair, pushing back his fringe. Since his impression he had stopped trying to hide the scar on his forehead. It was still very noticeable, but no longer caused him any difficulties.

"I'm aware of it. I had the morning all planned out when they showed me that photo," he grumbled. He stood and walked to the window. Outside he could see several of the riders had decided to do some flying drills, despite the lack of class this morning. "I feel so stretched out sometimes, Hermione, and so out of my depth. I never thought about flying people on tours," he confessed. "In fact, I didn't really think about what to do after we've dealt with the Ministry of Magic. I just thought the rocks would pay for everything."

She stood and walked over to stand close behind him. "They will probably pay for more than any of us can imagine, but not everyone is needed to make those rocks. May and I started thinking about other ways to make dragons and their riders useful and productive."

He shook his head and turned to look at her. "I'm glad you did, otherwise we'd still be floundering after the Ministry problem is solved."

"You're doing wonderfully, Harry. I think you've surprised everyone, even me, with how well you're handling things," she replied.

"I guess," he said dubiously.

She stepped closer and pulled him into a tight hug. He stiffened for a moment before relaxing into her hug. "I always knew you were special."

He nodded, then he stepped back and she dropped her arms, releasing him. She smiled at him and he gave her a weak smile in return, unsure about what had just happened. She turned and went to find May, leaving Harry standing there.

He wasn't sure what that was about but found he couldn't deny that hugging his best friend was a pleasant experience.

Office of the Undersecretary, Ministry of Magic, April 6th...

Umbridge sat at her desk and considered her options. She had been forced to give an unbreakable vow. Because it was forced, rather than freely given, the magic behind the vow wasn't as rock solid as it could have been. That meant she had some options available to her. She could, for example, support Cornelius openly, while at the same time planting evidence that could be found by someone else. It basically boiled down to interpretation. She could passively resist the vow if she wanted to. The big question was how.

Brent Thompson stuck his head inside the door. He was a bit confused about Umbridge's change of attitude recently, but he wasn't going to question it too closely.

"You sent for me, Ma'am?"

"Brent, do come in. I have a job which needs some special attention," she said smoothly, then she picked up a short list, which she handed to him.

He scanned the list and frowned. It wasn't long, but it contained some of the most influential and powerful members of the Wizengamot.

He looked up at her inquisitively.

"Those are the names of people suspected of working with the Goblins against the Ministry, Brent. I would like you to put a watch on them. I want to know what they do when they're not in the building, where they go and who they talk to. That sort of thing."

He nodded, a bit relieved. There were some very powerful figures on the list, people who could squash him like a bug. For a moment he'd thought he was going to be told to arrange for permanent accidents for these people.

Umbridge watched him leave her office and she felt a twinge of pain. She recognized that it came from the vow, warning her that she was skirting the edges of it. Thompson had a list that contained detailed instructions and names, and a charm which would cause him to forget about the parchment, leaving it somewhere randomly. That it was also on the official letterhead from Cornelius' office would raise major flags for anyone likely to find it.

Despite the action of handing off a charmed list, she was still tightly bound by that vow. Tonight she and two men would see to a member of the Wizengamot who hadn't been on that list, but who was still a major obstacle for Cornelius.

#10 Downing Street, London, April 6th...

"Sir, Lord Kennewick is here."

Prime Minister Major looked up and nodded. "Please send him in," he told his secretary, "then see we're not disturbed."

Major waited until Kennewick was seated. The younger man smiled briefly, then reached into a briefcase and pulled out a file, which he passed to Major.

"Sir, as of last week, we've located and co-opted some eighteen hundred and sixty wizards all totaled. Mind you, not all of them are suitable for combat, but we did luck out there. Country wide, we found a large number of them had gone into police work, since such work doesn't require an extensive education."

Major nodded knowingly and waited for Kennewick to continue.

"Our Yank friends borrowed some two hundred recent graduates of ours, and we expect to be getting them back in a month or two. That still left us with nearly eight hundred physically able wizards who have been spread out to various stations and commands around the country."

"What are we doing with those who aren't fit for combat?" asked Major.

Kennewick smiled thinly. "If you look at page six of your handout, you'll find that both MI5 and MI6 now sport new sub departments. Additionally, we've opened up a small training center for magical combat. On the whole, most of our disaffected wizards are very grateful that we're interested in what they can do and rather interested in teaching the wizarding world not to underestimate us."

Major nodded in approval. He had visited with a group of muggle born wizards who were being trained for the Diplomatic Protection Group and he'd received the same impression. They wanted to show the wizards just how wrong they had been.

"And the dragons?" he asked.

Kennewick frowned slightly. "Sir, I have to admit I am rather uncomfortable using untrained children." he paused when Major waved him to silence.

"Cyril, you and I go back a long way, so you know I wouldn't ask this if I didn't think it was important. I want you to see something," he said, then he picked up a remote control and turned to a TV.

"The images you see are taken by your Captain Atkins. She was asked to video tape some of the activities in the Weyr and was given some special hardware to do so. The Weyrleader knew she was taping them, but didn't object to it."

He turned to the TV and immediately recognized the camera was recording in the Infrared spectrum. A lone car sat in a field. At the edge of the field he could see several of the creatures who had a distinctive single bright pin point of light in their chests. It was thought this was the source of their fire, but no one knew for sure.

It was a highly debated idea. Pern standard dragons required Firestone in order to use Fire. Earth dragons had no such requirement. The fact that the fire they produced was hotter than the hottest blast furnace suggested that their fire was a product of their inherent magic, rather than some biologic process.

One dragon sprang aloft and made a single flaming pass over the car. The screen turned blindingly bright and he looked away for a few seconds. When the car was visible again, it was still very bright, but it had lost its shape and was no longer recognizable as a car. It was half its former height and slowly spreading out.

Off camera, the three other dragons that had been on the edge of the field took off and went Between. They appeared over the molten slag heap in a massive burst of blue. Kennewick blinked in surprise. The three dragons had taken a slowly cooling and melting pile of metal and had frozen it solid. The remains of the car had turned from bright yellow/red to a deep blue in an instant.

Kennewick was certain that even their gear designed for Arctic conditions would not survive that blast of cold.

The tape ended a minute later and Kennewick turned back to Major.

"After the incident in Kenya, I tasked Sir Robert March with making some simple measurements. I wanted to get an idea about the abilities of the dragons and what I learned both alarmed me and reassured me. Dragons are not immortal, but their fire, if delivered to any fighting vehicle we owned, would destroy it. I'm also certain that a dragon could probably render one of our ships of the fleet inoperative with that fire.

"On the other hand, they can be killed by tank fire, though you would be hard pressed to hit one that was airborne."

He paused and leaned back in his chair. "When Lord Mills and Sir Robert told me that the dragons wanted to help with our wizard problem. I stifled my laughter and politely thanked them for the offer. Then Sir Robert dressed me down like I was still a freshman. He told me that we might be fighting to wrest control from the wizards, but the dragons were fighting for their very lives. He also reminded me that if we were to be partners, then we would have to take them seriously."

"Your Captain Atkins sent a memo, via Sir Robert, informing me that the dragon riders are arming themselves so that they can fight on dragon back. She told me that they're concentrating on non-lethal weapons, but the potential for lethal combat is always there with the dragon's own fire.

"I've given this a lot of thought, Cyril, and I think we should use them, if possible. I'd like you to assign someone to assess their abilities and to coordinate with our operations. Warn your man that he's to treat the dragons and their riders just like he would any allied armed service," Major said firmly.

Kennewick looked at his Prime Minister for a moment longer, then he nodded reluctantly. "What about Captain Atkins? She has the best handle on their abilities right now. Someone else would be coming in fresh."

Major nodded. He didn't really care who did it and Atkins was already on the scene and familiar with the dragons.

"I'll see that the orders are issued today, Sir."

"Good. Now, what plans are we looking at for regaining control of the Ministry of Magic?"

Kennewick frowned. "We have several options open to us and we tried war gaming each of them but we quickly realized that we really couldn't predict their responses. I'm afraid we may end up confronting them directly, maybe even a full frontal assault on their building. We don't want to do that because they can get away too easily. That would end up turning this into a guerrilla campaign."

He rubbed his forehead tiredly. "I'm afraid we don't have a firm plan to present just yet," he admitted.

Major nodded, expecting a similar answer. He made a mental note to ask that Dumbledore fellow at some point what he thought.

"You'll continue to explore our options?" he pressed.

"Of course, sir."

He smiled. "Very well, let's move on. About the plans to name that new submarine," he said, switching subjects.

Kennewick winced. Normally his biggest worries were budget cuts, but sometimes other things cropped up that caused different problems and the political fallout over the proposed name for the first of the General Dynamics ballistic missile submarines was a perfect example of that.

The second human rider staffed Weyr came about at the one reserve that still maintained dragons and dragon handlers. The Tibetan Weyr at Maziang was once one of the poorest dragon reserves in the world. The dragon handlers on that reserve didn't cull their dragons, but fed and cared for them to the best of their abilities. When the dragon uprising began, they were largely spared of any of the turmoil that the other reserves experienced. Today, Maziang is a thriving Weyr and is often considered as the Dragon capital of Asia.

Excerpted from The Weyrs of Earth by Remus John Lupin, published 2040.

Author's Notes and Mockeries:

- Michaelangelo, seriously, we already used the "Luna spans person XYZ with a rainbow trout" routine. You'll have to do better than that.
- Amsef, if you were really interested in picking up a Fan Fiction writing hubby you would have forwarded a video of you pole dancing while juggling flaming bowling balls. It's what Alyx did to catch my attention.
- We don't know why so many people have a problem with the concept of an iDildo. I mean think on it, they already sell an iPad and I understand next year's model will have wings and a fresh spring like scent.
- Lily Potter. A lot of people took exception to the girl getting drunk during her pregnancy. You'll note we said she got drunk. We didn't say she was an alcoholic consuming a fifth of scotch every day. Finally we'll point out she was a product of the 70s so most likely she also smoked and engaged in SEX. (shudder) For some strange

reason fan fiction seems to have canonized the Potters when according to JKR they were a pair of twits who had let their guard down and went around unarmed when a lunatic was after them. I've said it before, I'll say it again. If I knew someone was out to kill me, I'd shower with a gun close by and sleep with it under my pillow. The Potters were people so stop thinking they were angels.

- GBTtown, Anti-Knucklehead wards? I love it and am probably going to find a way of using that someday. Probably in a crack fic. "Sorry Ron, you can't enter, there's an Anti-Knucklehead ward in place!"

- BJH, you're missing the point. We aren't condemning Ginny or doing anything with her. She is, like Ron, not important to the story. Personally I neither hate nor love Ginny, she's just a name of a poorly defined character and one which I opted to leave out of this story for the most part. You'll also note that a whole bunch of other characters are being ignored as unimportant. No Neville, no Patil twins, no Weasley twins etc. That's the point, to move Harry and a select few into the Weyr and create something new, not to move all of Hogwarts into the Weyr.

- I've often wondered why Fudge is treated as totally incompetent in both canon and in fan fiction. Here's a guy that rose to the highest position in the most corrupt government imaginable. Does that imply he's got some abilities? It does in my mind. I just figured that once Malfoy got his hooks into Fudge he was locked into being the nice minion or he'd go to jail. Without Malfoy pulling his strings, the real Fudge could come out to play.

- Shaggy37, Remus has fallen into the role of the Weyr Historian. What he was type would ultimately become his best selling book but for now its just a document that he and the people at the Weyr see. And by the way, his best selling novel was a sad tale about a Werewolf that falls in love with a fire hydrant.

- For all those impatient people out there, Croaker will be back. And so will most of the aurors that quit. Please remember that not everything happens overnight and a lot of stuff needs to happen before we get from point a to point b.

- Artur Hawkwing 1, actually the reviews we respond to can be positive or negative. I write these responses on the day I publish the

chapter and pick whatever floats my boat. Oh and thanks for the review.

Standard Disclaimer:

Bob stepped out onto the stage and smiled at the audience. The theater was packed and for the most part, they had left their pitchforks and torches home this week. He frowned at the small contingent that was setting up a battery of mortar tubes and thought that he really need to speak to Alyx about her fan club.

"Ladies and Gentlemen we have a special treat for you tonight," he began, then he paused as one of the audience members dropped a mortar shell on the floor. He smirked as they scrambled for cover and shook his head. "Amateurs," he muttered. "They keep this up and they'll destroy the section reserved for the Snape and Weasley lovers."

Bob stopped in shock, then he grinned at the clumsy artillery crew. "Do it again," he whispered.

Realizing things were getting out of hand he gave himself a little shake and smiled again. "Tonight we have a special guest disclaimer!"

A spotlight fell to center stage and Chekiath walked out.

Bob walked over to the side and stood proudly, then Alyx whirled in on her new anti-matter powered wheel chair. He sighed and shook his head. "I thought I told you to leave the guy in the wheel chair alone. Did you have to take his chair?"

"He's not alone," she replied smugly. "When I left him he was surrounded by wolves that wanted to play."

Bob blinked, then shrugged. For some reason they never kept neighbors for too long.

"So what's Chekiath doing?"

"He's telling people that we don't own Harry Potter or the Dragon Riders of Pern," Bob replied smugly.

Alyx looked perplexed. "But I don't hear anything."

"Of course not, we're not in the story so we can't hear dragons for real. Now that would be silly."

Alyx scratched at an armpit and looked confused. "But how will the readers know then?"

Bob shrugged. "Not my problem. I only write the stuff, if they can't hear the dragon it's their problem."

Alyx nodded and she smiled happily as wolves howled in the distance. "The house up the street is for sale again!" she announced. "Want a ride?"

"Why not?" Bob replied, then he climbed into her lap. "Enjoy the chapter folks."

Dragon fire is one of the most dangerous fires known to wizard kind. In fact the natural dragon fire was the model for the spell development of Fiendfyre. It is said that dragons have a great degree of control over their fire, but there is no proof to back up that myth.

Excerpt from *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find them* by Newt Scamander. Published 1927.

Campbeltown Weyr, Hangar #2, April 7th...

Harry stood up on the dais, along with Captain Atkins and four of her people. As the riders filed into the room with their dragons, they immediately noted the ten red and white targets that had been placed against one wall. It was a temporary situation until a permanent range could be built at the Weyr.

"Settle down and relax, people," Harry called.

When they were all settled, he reached into a box and pulled out a strange looking contraption which looked like a combination bow and pistol.

"Sometime in the near future, the British government will confront the Ministry of Magic in an attempt to force the Ministry to return to its proper role of being subservient to the government."

He walked around the table until he was facing them. Placing the pistol down, he hopped up onto the table and looked at his riders.

"The British are fighting for themselves, but they are also fighting for us. I'm not keen on fighting, but I have offered the British our help if they want it. Because of that, we are going to learn a new skill," he said, then he picked up the pistol and held it so all can see it. "This weapon could be lethal, but I have enchanted enough ammunition for it that it's non-lethal."

He reached into his pocket and pulled out a bright red bolt about eight inches long. It was obvious that someone had deliberately blunted the tip. He held it up for all to see. "You will note the tip is blunted. I deliberately did this because I do not want us to go out with the intent to deliberately kill. Mind you, we have some advantages."

He held up a finger, "One, we're dragon riders. If you find yourselves faced against lethal force, you can always tell your dragon to use fire.

"Two, some of us are magical. That means that these bolts aren't just ordinary bolts. Since I can't give our non-magical riders magic, I opted for something different. Chapman! Come up here."

Gordon Chapman blinked in surprise, then he reluctantly went up to the table.

Harry smiled thinly at him and handed him the red bolt. "Smack that against the palm of your hand," he said.

When Chapman eyed him warily, his smile became a smirk. "Your dragon would not let me harm you," he said, stating the obvious.

Surprised, Chapman looked at the red bolt carefully, then he smacked it against his palm. He flashed a bright red for a second, then soundlessly collapsed to the ground. Most of the riders sucked in a breath and looked alarmed.

Harry held up a hand. "He's just stunned. He'll stay that way for hours or until someone cancels the spell."

He pulled out his wand and pointed it at Chapman. "Finite," he said softly.

Immediately, Hermione raised her hand.

Chapman groaned slightly and Harry bent over to help him to his feet, then he pat his back. "Thanks Gordon. The Weyr appreciates your help."

Chapman blinked owlishly and stumbled back to his seat, unsure exactly what had happened or why he was up at the dais. That particular spell not only stunned, it also scrambled one's memory slightly.

Harry turned his attention to Hermione and ignored the chuckles from the riders. "Yes, Hermione, I know that wasn't the proper counter spell for a standard stunner, but you can't enchant something with a standard stunner. Also, since this has the same effect as a stunner, but uses a different counter, it will be harder for wizards to revive someone who's been stunned. Any wizard who doesn't know the counter will have to wait three hours for the spell to wear off.

She looked surprised, then nodded.

"I chose these weapons because they give us an ability to protect ourselves and our dragons and they won't interfere with your dragon in flight, unlike firing a real pistol. There is no blast of sound when firing that could hurt your dragon's hearing or interfere with their concentration. We have a variety of bolts to choose from and each bolt is color coded according to its function," he said, then he held up a pure black bolt.

"Does anyone want to try this one?" he asked with a grin.

"I'll try it," said a surprising voice.

Harry turned to see Draco stand up.

He looked at the others for a moment, then shrugged. "Like he said, our dragons won't let him hurt us and I can't see him doing anything damaging."

Harry grinned and held out the black bolt. Draco reached for it and slammed it against his palm like Chapman did. He staggered for a

second then looked off to one side. "Please tell me this isn't permanent?" he pleaded.

Harry already had his wand out. "Finite," he said softly and Draco staggered again. Harry turned to the others. "Draco was hit with a blinding spell."

He smiled in thanks and nodded for Draco to take a seat again.

"We will be learning to use these pistols with the targets you see set up, but we'll be using regular bolts. A real firing range will come later, but we'll use what we have for now," he said, waving towards the targets against the wall. "Once we're proficient there we'll move onto using them on dragonback."

He looked around. "Questions?"

May stood and looked uncertain. "Are you sure this is a good way to go, Harry?" she asked. "I'm not sure I like the idea of us fighting."

He nodded and sat down on the table. "Let's talk about that then. Hermione, I can tell from your expression that you don't like the idea either."

Hermione nodded unhappily.

"Any others? Raise your hands if you're against this?" he said quietly.

A good one third of the riders raised their hands, while several others looked like they were undecided.

"Prime Minister Major is looking to regain control over the Ministry, and the simple fact is, the British Government is just a short step from having a full blown civil war on its hands," he said quietly. "I feel for the British, I really do, but I have no choice but to help them. They are fighting for our dragons. They are fighting for an idea that intelligence, regardless of form, is a person with rights. That's something I must agree with. Intelligence is the definition of a person. My dragon is a person, your dragons are people. They might not be human, but they are people. The elves who work here in the Weyr are people, and so are the goblins and all of the other magical, intelligent species.

"Now, we can sit on the sidelines, and owe our existence to the British and any other country where we have to deal with a Ministry that refuses to recognize our rights to exist as a free people. Or we can take an active part in earning that right. I don't know about the rest of you, but I intend to earn a place for my dragon and myself. The British government has been extremely helpful to us, but in the long run, I want to be able to look in the mirror and know I earned a place in society for myself and my dragon."

He paused and looked at them intently, his voice dropped lower. "Make no mistake, people. The British Ministry of Magic is just the tip of the iceberg. Success here will grant us a safe home, but we have an entire world full of wizarding ministries to convince, one way or another. Think about that."

A silence fell over the riders, the only noise coming from the large space heater.

Finally, Luna stood up. "I don't think I'm a fighter, but I'll learn how, for my dragon and for you, Harry. We can't hunt for Snorkacks if we're always running away from people. I know you'll be out in front fighting for us, so it's only right for me to help you."

Harry smiled and nodded gratefully to Luna.

"I'll learn also," Susan Bones said firmly. "My aunt is dead. The Weyr is the only family I have left and that's worth fighting for."

Slowly the other riders nodded to him. Finally, he turned to Hermione and May, the last two holdouts.

"I don't think I can kill, Harry," May said unhappily. She didn't want to disappoint him, but there it was.

"May," he replied in a gentle tone, "I'm not asking you to kill. I'm asking you to defend yourself and your dragon. Most of the bolts we'll carry will be enchanted with non-lethal spells designed to protect you and others."

He turned to Hermione, who locked gazes with him.

"My rider wants to know if you're sure of this?" Comaloth asked.

"No, I'm not sure, Comaloth, but I do know that we have to stand up for ourselves. And until I can come up with a better idea, this will have to do," he replied privately. "I'm afraid she'll have to trust me to do what we need."

Hermione looked surprised as Comaloth relayed his comments, then she nodded. She trusted Harry and knew he was one of the most honest people she knew. If he firmly believed this was the way to go, she'd go along with it.

May looked at Hermione, who gave her a weak smile, then she turned back to Harry. "All right, I'll do it for Trath, but I don't think I'm going to like it."

Harry nodded. "Thank you, May. You know I wouldn't ask this of you if I didn't think it was necessary."

She nodded. "I know and that's the most convincing argument, by the way. If you think we need this then we probably do."

He grinned at her, then turned to the others again. He'd known it would be a tough sell, but now that the moral implications had been dealt with, they could get to the nitty gritty details.

He nodded to Captain Atkins and Sergeant Nichols. "I'm going to turn this over to our British Army friends now because this is as new to me as it is you. Captain Atkins and Sergeant Nichols are going to start off with a course on basic weapon safety. I understand that we'll even practice using army issue firearms so that we can see the differences between our weapons and theirs. While we're in class or working with these weapons, you will follow their orders."

He jumped down from the table and handed the pistol to Captain Atkins before stepping down and finding himself an open chair.

She carefully placed the weapon back into a case, then stepped forward. "In this class you will do what Sergeant Nichols and I say or the Weyrleader and I will find something nasty for you to work on. I will tolerate no fooling around, especially if you have a weapon in your hand."

She glared at the riders for a moment, then she motioned to Sergeant Nichols, who stepped forward. "You have seen Staff Sergeant Nichols around the Weyr. Perhaps you have even spoken to him a few times. What you probably do not know is that Staff Sergeant Nichols is a former small arms instructor and a four time winner of the British National Small Arms Competition. When he speaks, you will listen and obey him."

Sure that she had their attention, she nodded to Nichols ,who stepped forward and looked them over. He was a small man and none of them knew he was as capable as Captain Atkins said.

"Let's start with the 12 commandments of weapons safety, shall we? Then we'll move on to firing range rules. In a few days, when I feel you've memorized those rules completely, I might even allow you to touch one of these weapons."

Atkins leaned against the table and watched Nichols at work. The man was a master in his trade and one hundred percent serious about it. By the time he was done with the riders, they would be capable of caring for their weapons and several others with a minimum of fuss.

Campbeltown Weyr, Kitchen Hall, April 10th...

As was their custom, Harry convened the Weyr council meeting after a meal, usually breakfast, but that varied. Today the meeting started after diner. Anyone could attend, but only the council members were supposed to be there.

"I don't have a lot of items in my notes for tonight, so we'll just run through them and take it from there," Harry said, then he glanced down at his notes and smiled. "I have heard from our friends at Maziang. Apparently it took Master Jangbu and Nokrenth both to convince his village of what they could have. It had been thought that they would simply come back with some new way of helping control their dragons, not bring back news of their intelligence.

"Nokrenth tells me that Lobsang is translating our handbook and they have set the flight suits we gave them with their village tailors, who are making a number of them. Nokrenth said that of the eighty children in the village only about thirty five are capable of impressing

and of age. Mind you, all of them are wizards. There are another twenty who they think might be able to impress in a few years.

"I've thought about this and I really want their clutching females and those we have next season to share the hatching Weyr. We will have to rely on the dragon's inherent ability to translate for us, but I will feel better if they get their basic training from us. At some point, I think it's going to be necessary to let each Weyr use their own hatching facility. For now, I want to make sure that we'll handle the first generation of rider training so that they can go back to their own Weyrs and train their riders there."

"Harry?"

He looked up from his notes. "Yes, Hermione?"

"I think we should plan a Weyr visit to Maziang, maybe in the summer. It would allow the Maziang village to see what riders are about first hand. It would also give us a chance to see how they are progressing and what areas they may still need to address."

Harry nodded. It made sense to him. He glanced around to see nods from all of the council. "Good idea. Let's plan for something in the summer, including all of the riders for a week visit." He frowned. "We're going to need tents, I guess. The only tents we have we left standing at Disko Island."

"No, we should have them back here in a few weeks," Hermione corrected. "Susan and I are looking into buying some kitted buildings that the elves can erect for us. Once they're set up, we'll apply space charms on them. Both Albus and Remus have agreed to teach Susan and I the charms."

"How much will each building cost, Hermione?" asked Karen Khan.

She shrugged. "We haven't picked one out yet, but they run the range of twenty thousand pounds up to forty five thousand, depending on size and features."

Karen nodded reflectively.

"Will that be a problem, Karen?" Harry asked.

"No, not really. From all that I've seen, our cash position is only going to improve."

He nodded and checked off one item on his list, then he paused and frowned.

"What's the matter, Harry?" asked Remus.

"Something just occurred to me. Sir Robert, before we think about building any sort of permanent structures on Disko, what are the chances of that volcano blowing up and wrecking the Weyr?"

Sir Robert looked up in surprise, then he grinned. "I'm not sure, but I promise you, my boy, we'll find out and at some point we'll have to talk to the Danes about our using their island."

Harry nodded and turned back to Hermione. "I'm going to go with caution here. Let's wait and see what Sir Robert can learn before we put up buildings that we might lose."

She nodded at him and he glanced down at his notebook again. "I'm out of topics, so let's open things up to anything new."

Katherine stood and everyone turned their attention to her. "Yesterday, the riders received their first hands on lesson in small arms. Sergeant Nichols feels that they are coming along well, but they still have a long way to go before they are proficient."

"Also, last night I received a directive from the office of the Minister of Defense. It completely bypassed the regular chain of command and instructed me to work with the riders in developing their combat capacity so that they can assist British forces. The Prime Minister has ordered Lord Kennewick to accept Harry's offer of assistance and I'll be helping figure out how and where that will happen."

"There are several roles that dragons might fill, so for now I'm planning on keeping an open mind and just helping develop their abilities," she said, then she sat down.

Harry looked somewhat smug, but he knew that many of the riders had a residual loyalty to Britain. This would further his plans for them to learn to defend themselves in his mind. Unlike the others, he had

no particular loyalty to any country. His bond demanded total loyalty to his dragons and that's what he gave.

Sir Robert stood next. "We have a preliminary design for a first generation power unit. In fact, it's a copy of a standard nuclear power station, except that we use the heat from the SDTS instead of a nuclear reactor. The fact that we can use an existing design is simplifying matters considerably.

"We expect to see construction of a test station here at Campbeltown in a few months. The concept is simple. We move the Weyr onto its own power system while proving the concept. Plans are in the works for us to put out a bid for a five megawatt power station. That's a lot bigger than we need, but the station needs to be big enough to adequately test the design.

"Right now, we intend to put the station out at the extreme northwest corner of Campbeltown and that area will be sectioned off to limit the possibility of any workers getting into the Weyr. The government has purchased the land adjoining that section and I've been reviewing the plans for the facility we're planning on building. I promise we'll try not to crowd you out.

"Finally, next week we expect a three man delegation from the Americans to arrive. Supposedly it will comprise mostly people from NASA."

"You'll be overseeing them, Sir Robert?" Harry asked.

He nodded

Harry looked around, "Anything else?"

Albus raised his hand. "I have some news and I'm afraid it's not good news at all."

Harry motioned for him to continue.

"I received word this morning from Minerva. Last night, Augusta Longbottom was murdered in her home. According to Minerva, this is the third member of the Wizengamot to be killed in as many days. From a political standpoint, the victims represent both conservatives

and moderates. The only pattern I can see is a general weakening of the body by removing some of their guiding elements."

"Is Neville all right?" asked Harry.

Dumbledore looked surprised and he shook his head. "To be honest, I can only assume so, Harry. He would have been still in school when this happened. If you like, I can send a note to Minerva asking about him."

Harry nodded. He considered Neville a friend, even if they hadn't been close. Some of the things he had learned from Sirius and Remus about Neville's parents only made him feel closer to the quiet Gryffindor.

He looked down at his feet for a moment, before turning back to Albus. "What are the odds that the Ministry is behind this?"

"I would be surprised if they weren't, Harry," he replied.

"Perhaps you should get together with Lord Mills, then. Maybe brief him on what you suspect so he can pass the information along?"

Albus smiled. "I'd planned on doing just that after the meeting."

Harry nodded and looked around, "Anything else?"

"I have an idea that I'd like to broach," Sirius said.

Harry flinched and looked worried.

Sirius grinned then he shook his head. "No, I'm not going to tell you we need dragon sized whoopee cushions. I was thinking the other day, Harry, about Chapman."

"Oh?" Harry said guardedly. He shifted in his chair noticeably and grabbed hold of it. "I'm braced for it, lay it on us."

Sirius smirked, then looked at the others. "Harry's said time and time again that this isn't a prison or a convent. I agree with his comments, but by the same token, we could make things a little easier. Every one of our riders have parents who signed confidentiality

agreements. I think we could make arrangements for the riders to have their parents, at least, come to the Weyr and see their kids.

"Those with girlfriends or boyfriends will need other arrangements, of course, but..." he trailed off and shrugged.

"A family day," murmured James and Sirius nodded emphatically.

Harry shrugged, "I don't have any problems with it," he said. "Talk to Remus and Captain Atkins. If you can work up something acceptable, then let the riders know so they can contact their families."

Sirius nodded, a bit perplexed by Harry response, as it seemed very restrained. It wouldn't be until later after the meeting that he realized he had proposed a function that Harry could not participate in.

Luna's Weyr, Campbeltown, later that evening...

Hermione stepped into Luna's Weyr and eyed the strangely decorated rooms with interest. She had not visited Luna's rooms before and now she could see Luna had been very busy decorating. Beaded tapestries hung from the walls, and tie-dyed curtains hung in the windows.

It looked like something straight out of the 1960's. The room literally exploded with colorful pillows and cushions all over the place. Luna had even managed to find a small Lava Lamp which sat as the center piece on a small table. Had Hermione only looked, she would have been shocked to discover that, though the lamp functioned as it should, the power cord had been cut off.

Luna stood and watched as all of the girls, as well as Emma and Katherine Atkins, settled in on her cushions before she began to speak.

"Most of you don't know this, but my great great great grandparents were the last recorded couple to undergo a soul bonding. They also co-authored the only English book on the subject. Because of their bonding, and now my bond with my dragon, I've renewed my family's interest in bonds in general, and specifically what we have with our dragons. I asked you all here because we're faced with a bit

of a problem and I thought that perhaps I should warn everyone about it."

"Goodness, Luna, what ever is wrong?" exclaimed Emma.

Luna blushed slightly, then she lifted her chin. "All right, let's throw it out there. Sex and our dragon bond."

Most of the girls frowned.

"What about it?" asked May.

"Like humans, dragons are sexually active year round. Unlike humans, they come into a egg producing cycle only twice a year," Luna said firmly. "Historically, we now know for certain that when our dragons rise to mate, their riders are deeply affected because of the bond."

"Affected? How?" asked Katherine sharply.

Luna's blush deepened. She looked down at the floor for a moment, then she looked at Katherine. "It's quite possible that when our dragons rise to mate, we'll also seek out a partner for the human version of that activity. I spoke to Spath at length about this. The old time Weyrs rarely practiced monogamy. This isn't to say that couples didn't form. They did, and the relationships were often very strong. But the riders knew that a dragon heavily influenced a person and it wasn't uncommon to find someone coupling with someone they didn't even like, simply because of the bond.

"It can be resisted, or arrangements can be made with a suitable partner before hand. The point is, you all need to be aware of this possibility."

She paused and took in the stunned expressions. "There is one problem however. Harry."

"Harry?" exclaimed Hermione. "Why?"

"His bond is with all dragons, Hermione," Luna said gently. "Even now it affects him, though he hides it well. The other bonded man we know doesn't seem to be affected at all, but Hagrid, as sweet as

he is, is not completely human and therefore I believe he is affected differently."

Several girls looked relieved by Luna's announcement about Hagrid.

"Is that why Harry sometimes disappears when a dragon rises?" asked Michelle. "I thought he just found it embarrassing. We all know how shy he is."

Luna shook her head. "No, more likely he ducks out of sight to avoid showing just how affected he is. For all I know, he may go off somewhere to relieve his tension or just take a cold shower. If other dragons affect him, I don't think he's going to be very coherent or capable of fighting it when his own dragon rises for the first time."

Luna looked around at each girl. "I want to make one thing clear here. Historically, Weyrs were not monogamous because riders often found themselves coupling with the other rider involved in the mating. Couples can and will form, but you need to be aware that if your mate's dragon rises to cover another female, you'll likely find your mate coming to you for sex. If you aren't in the mood, your mate will probably seek out the one person they know who will be in the mood, the other rider. This is all dependent upon how strong willed the people involved are.

"Harry Potter is without a doubt one of the strongest willed men I know and I'm not sure he'll be able to resist Chekiath's rising."

Emma heaved a great sigh. "So, what you're telling me is that all of you girls will probably be sexually active in... what? What time frame are we dealing with here?" she asked Luna.

"According to Spath, a male will rise the first time around a year from hatching. Females take a little bit longer. We also have to factor in the different varieties of dragons that have impressed. We are most likely looking at next spring for most of our dragons, since we had a February hatching."

"I better talk to James about getting these girls to a gynecologist," Emma muttered with a glance to Katherine, who nodded in agreement.

"If it's birth control you're worried about, there's a potion that gives six months of protection. It works for witches and normal women," Susan offered.

"Chekiath won't be interested in rising until December at the earliest, since he was hatched mid November," May mused.

"I am looking forward to it. There are more female dragons among the riders than males," Chekiath announced to the group. "Harry seems reluctant to pick one, or even a couple, but I'm sure he will, sooner or later. It is such a delicious group."

Hermione's expression grew wild and Luna blushed so deeply she nearly glowed.

May looked in the direction of Harry's Weyr. "Cheki, how long have you been listening in? And does Harry know what we've been talking about?"

"I've been listening since you first called my name. And no, Harry fell asleep reading one of those big books of his. Should I wake him and tell him?"

"No!" exclaimed the other girls, then Hermione calmly said. "No, Cheki, don't wake him. He obviously needs his sleep and it's not really important enough to tell him about this conversation."

"If you're sure? He'd probably appreciate it if I did wake him. He can't be comfortable slumped over that book at his desk."

Nearly every girl in the room shook their head vigorously.

"We're very sure, Chekiath. And Harry will be fine," Luna said, looking very flustered.

"Very well then. Since Harry's asleep, I might as well sleep, too. Good night, riders," Chekiath said, then he fell silent.

"That would not have happened if Harry was awake," May said softly.

Hermione nodded. "No, it wouldn't, but we brought that on ourselves by referring to the dragon by name."

"You know, I could have told you that Chekiath was listening in," said Trath.

May frowned. "Well, why didn't you?"

"You didn't ask me," Trath said a bit smugly. "I like Chekiath. He is very handsome. And I know you like Harry."

May paled and shook her head. "I swear sometimes it's like talking to my little sister," she muttered.

That set the girls to laughing.

When the laughter died down, Michelle frowned and Karen leaned over to her then poked her in the shoulder. "What are you scowling about?" She demanded.

Michelle shrugged and her hands played with her skirt. "I can't decide. Is it better to have that first sexual encounter before my dragon rises or have it when my dragon rises? Either way, according to my mum, it can hurt a lot."

Several other girls looked towards Katherine and Emma for confirmation and Emma visibly flinched. Her first time hadn't been painful because she had lost her maidenhood during years of horseback riding. She could tell them that, but did she really want to encourage them?

The Granger's Quarters, Campbeltown Weyr...

Emma stepped into the spacious quarters they had been given and spotted Dan sitting on the couch holding a strange object.

"What's that?" she asked.

He looked up at her and grinned. "Do you remember that dragon with a bad tooth? The one from the Hatching Weyr?"

She nodded. "Yes, she was from a Weyr in America, wasn't she?"

"That's right. Apparently that tooth finally came free. She managed to save the tooth and then had Dobby bring it to me. She felt it would make a fitting trophy for a 'Tooth Puller'," he said with a grin. He held

up a tooth that was nearly eight inches long. It was possible to see that the root was barely two inches deep, very shallow for a tooth of that size.

Emma took the tooth and examined it with interest. Despite having no real desire to return to dentistry, she couldn't help but look it over with a professional eye. "There's no real depth to the root," she murmured.

"I know, but look at that thing! Serrated in the back and a sharp point. That is clearly the tooth of a meat eater. No wonder I couldn't get any dragons interested in roughage as a cleanser," he said.

Emma looked up at him. "What will you do with it?"

Dan looked thoughtful, "Well, Skanth seemed to think that it's important, and most of the dragons I've helped since have been very grateful. Maybe I'll run down to the carpentry shop that Sir Robert's people set up and make up a stand for it. It'd make a nice conversation piece."

She nodded and smiled at her husband. He was a good dentist and very handy with most tools. Before they were forced to flee their home, he had been building a cabinet and shelves for her study.

"How did your meeting with Luna and the girls go?" he asked.

She hid her wince. "It was interesting," she replied guardedly.

"Em," he said in caution, "you know you can't get away with that sort of thing with me."

She sighed. They really had no secrets between them. "Are you sure you want to know? I mean, what else can a bunch of girls who are approaching the age of consent talk about?"

"Boys," he grumbled, his face screwing into an unhappy expression. "Hermione, too?"

"Hermione, too. Honestly, Dan, you might be able to lie to yourself, but you've admitted to me that, at their age, all you kept hoping for was to meet a girl who'd have sex with you. And I can't tell you how grateful I was that you grew out of that particular male attitude,"

Emma replied tartly. "Our daughter is growing up, and having her own dragon may accelerate that a little."

Dan ran a hand through his hair and Emma was startled to notice the tinge of gray growing there. "I'm sorry, Em. I guess I just don't want my little princess to grow up."

"Your little princess has a forty foot long dragon who could bite you in two, Daniel Patrick Granger. I think it's time for you to accept that she's growing up into a beautiful woman," Emma said gently.

He smiled at her a bit sadly. "She is beautiful, but then, she got that from you." He gave her a look that she knew intimately, and as always, it sent shivers down her back. She stood and offered her hand to him.

"Come to bed, love."

He took her hand and followed her into their bedroom.

Hermione will find her own path, Emma thought. I can help a little, but she has to make her own choices. She turned to her husband and gave him a soft kiss before slowly unbuttoning her blouse.

Dan watched avidly and his desire helped fuel hers.

Transfiguration Classroom, Hogwarts, April 12th...

"Remember, class, the incantation is 'transverto'", Minerva said, then she started when her hat was pushed off her head and the sorting hat appeared there.

"Deputy Headmistress, there is a large body of men approaching the castle. I have already expelled several who bore the Dark Mark," Clarence told her.

Minerva frowned and looked at the class. She did not want a bunch of second years here if she was about to have a confrontation with the Ministry. She was about to ask them to go to the library for a quiet study period, when the door slammed open and six men waltzed into the room as if they owned the place.

"I'm Wizarding Defense Force Captain Adrian Finch. You are commanded to turn over the Longbottom heir to our custody immediately," said a man.

"You're arresting him?" she exclaimed.

Finch nodded with a smirk. "He is guilty of aiding and abetting his grandmother in her treasonous crimes. We are taking him in for interrogation."

"He's lying," pronounced the hat. "I see your imagination still hasn't improved, Adrian."

Finch colored up and looked at Minerva with disdain. "Are you going to let a hat tell you what to do?"

Minerva shrugged. "The hat currently holds the keys to the wards and is acting for Hogwarts in the capacity of Headmaster until Headmaster Dumbledore can return. As for Mr. Longbottom, I am personally responsible for him and will not release him unless you can show me a duly authorized warrant from either the DMLE or the Wizengamot.

"And before you forge a DMLE document, I know the DMLE is not operating," Minerva said harshly.

Finch scowled. He'd been given no orders to come to Hogwarts and had no warrant. Getting one would require a great deal of explaining first and he saw that as a waste of time. He had been part of the group that had killed Augusta and he hoped that by being proactive he would advance his career.

All of his group were as ambitious as he was, and one of them thought it was time to be extra useful to the boss. "You'll do what you're told, slut!" he snarled, then he whipped out his wand. "Crucio!"

Minerva flicked her wand and her desk flowed fluidly to a position in front of her, then it solidified into a marble slab, blocking the curse. The castle rang with a screeching noise and the man who fired the curse found himself picked up and flung against the nearest wall with bone smashing speed. He screamed in pain, then his screams turned to terror as the castle wall became black as pitch.

The man faded from view and his screams suddenly cut off as if he had been silenced. The castle was trying to protect Minerva and protect her children from witnessing this scene, but it was pretty obvious, the man was being killed.

"Get out," snarled the hat, "or he won't be the only one to suffer the wrath of Hogwarts!"

The men paled and began to tremble. They could feel the power that was suddenly focusing on them. It was beyond anything they had ever experienced and they knew without a doubt that this wasn't Minerva's doing.

"Retreat!" yelled Finch. He had lost a man and knew he couldn't even complain to Thompson or Umbridge about it. Not without admitting he had gone and acted without orders.

The men fled the room, leaving a stunned Minerva and a class full of frightened children behind. The castle might have hidden the fate of that man, but the students knew something truly terrible had happened.

"Class," Minerva said in a quavering tone, "please go to the library and study for the rest of the period."

She watched the stunned students file from her class, then she fled to her office and her bottle of seventy five year old whiskey.

What she didn't know was that by nightfall, three different members of the Wizengamot would hear about the vicious attack on the Deputy Headmistress from their heirs and grandchildren who witnessed the attack. They would also detail the attempt to illegally arrest the scion of the Longbottom family.

Crawley Town park, April 12th...

Harry and Hermione appeared high above the park using Hermione's jump imagery. Harry wasn't sure why she wanted him to come with her, but she had asked and Chekiath was bugging him to get out more often just to relax. It was a down day for most of the riders with no classes scheduled, and he had nothing pressing that couldn't wait.

Emma spoke to Hermione after their night at Luna's and told her that if she wanted him, she'd have to get off her duff and do something about it. Hermione had considered her possible moves and knew with Harry it would have to be done in small steps. With that in mind, she opted for showing him a very important piece of her life.

The pair spiraled to a landing in a small clearing on top of a large hill. He dismounted and then walked over to help Hermione with her dismount. As much as she had gotten used to flying, she still slithered down the side of her dragon. Although he couldn't blame her, really. Comaloth was showing all the same signs as Chekiath with his phenomenal growth. Comaloth was forty feet long and looking more golden every day. The drop from her neck was now nearly ten feet down to the ground. Comaloth and several of the other dragons would soon rival Chekiath in terms of size.

Harry had it equally as bad. Chekiath was taller than Comaloth, but Harry wasn't bothered by the drop like Hermione was.

Strangely, all of the impressed dragons were all growing at unprecedented rates and their coloring was changing. Both Hermione and Susan Bones had Horntail dragons with a golden cast to their scales, but Michelle's Wivaronth also had a golden cast to her scales and she was a different breed.

He watched with a smile as Chekiath moved closer to Comaloth and they both took on a shimmer that he had come to learn was the dragon's way of being unobserved. Hermione shook her head at Comaloth's antics. Her dragon had taken to listening in whenever Hermione read for pleasure and had discovered she had an avid audience in the other dragons by retelling those stories.

Harry had been surprised that Hermione read something other than textbooks. But once he thought about it, he realized that even Hermione couldn't read textbooks all the time.

Hermione smiled at him and pointed towards a large flat rock that appeared to have a tree growing from it. On closer inspection, he realized that the rock had been split and the tree had grown between the two halves.

Hermione sat down and pulled out a small package. which she expanded with a silent spell.

"I used to come here when I was little," she said softly. "It was one of the few places I could go where the neighborhood kids didn't bother me."

"Bad, huh?" he asked, feeling a little uncomfortable.

She smiled at him. "The kids my own age never liked me because I read all the time. I thought homework was important. They didn't understand or want to understand. It wasn't until I was eight that even I came to understand."

"Understand what, Hermione?"

She looked at him. "It had been a very difficult day. The kids had picked on me all day long and one pushed me and I fell over. A library book I was carrying fell into a puddle," she said, then she shivered slightly and her gaze grew distant.

"My parents are very driven people," she murmured. "Always doing something for their careers. Somewhere along the way, we lost touch with each other. I felt alone because it seemed like they never really had any time for me. That wasn't really true, but what does an eight year old know?"

She waved a hand, taking in the clearing. "I came here. It was in December and there was a light rain, but I had ruined a library book and didn't know who I could turn to. At the time, I couldn't think of a worse thing to do than to ruin a library book. Don't laugh, but I honestly thought I'd go to prison for it. When I didn't come home at the right time, my parents panicked. It was dark and I finally realized I made a mistake, coming here. I was cold, wet and utterly miserable. Then my daddy came running into the clearing," she said, then pointed in a direction.

"He picked me up and held me close and he cried."

Her voice dropped to a whisper. "It all came out that night. My parents realized that they had accidentally given me the opinion that their jobs were more important than me. That night I slept in their bed for the first time since I was four. But I learned that day just how

important I was to my family. It was a stupid misunderstanding on my part and for their part they came to understand what I was going through at school."

She reached over and took his hand in hers. "It not easy for me to admit I don't understand some things, but I came to realize that I didn't fully understand my best friend, either. Sirius talked about a family day and I suddenly realized that you couldn't share that with anyone. You had no one to come rescue you in the dark when you were eight and alone."

Harry tried to look away, but he couldn't. Her brown eyes pierced him. "I wanted to share this with you, Harry. I wanted you to know about my moment when things looked darkest. I wanted to tell you so that you'd know how important this place is to me. But I also wanted to tell you because I had another time when someone rescued me and I knew from that point on that his life and mine would be forever linked."

She paused and gently rubbed his knuckles with her thumb.

He stared at her and his expression grew confused. "What are you saying?" he asked.

She reached up with her free hand and pushed his hair back out of his eyes. "I'm saying that I want to be with you, Harry. I'm saying that I like you more than just as best friends."

"Do you really mean that?" he asked.

Hermione bit back a retort. She quickly realized he wasn't questioning her motives, he was questioning why anyone would want him. She sighed slightly and nodded. "I mean it, Harry," she replied, then she leaned closer to him and kissed him lightly on the lips. She pulled back and looked at him. He appeared to be stunned into silence.

"Harry?" she said worriedly.

He blinked and shook his head. "I'm sorry, Hermione, I'm just trying to wrap my mind around this and suddenly I feel totally confused."

She nodded, expecting his reaction. "What are you confused about?"

"Why me?"

She looked at him for a moment before realizing he wasn't asking for a list of his good qualities, he was asking why because he didn't think anyone would think of him in that way. "Is it so hard to think that someone might love you?"

He flinched as though he'd been hit and looked away.

Alarmed, she rose on her knees and grabbed him by the shoulders, turning him to face her. She was surprised to see his eyes filled with tears.

"No one has ever said that to me before," he said in an anguished tone. "I don't know what to do with that."

Shocked, she pulled him into a hug and held him for a moment. She wasn't about to tell him that at least four other girls would love to have a go at him. After a moment, she pulled back and let him gather his composure.

They sat in silence for a moment and she wracked her brain, trying to figure out where to go from there when he began to speak.

"The Dursley's hated me," he said flatly. "There wasn't a lot of physical abuse after I turned five. In a bout of accidental magic, I blew Uncle Vernon through a wall. He had been hitting me with his belt again and after a really hard hit I couldn't take it anymore. After that, the only one I had to worry about was Dudley, who used to like beating me up, him and his gang.

"No, they no longer hit me, but they would forget to feed me, or let me out of my cupboard to go to the bathroom. All my life I've been told I'm worthless and unloved. No matter how hard I tried, I just wasn't good enough for them. I cooked, I cleaned, I let Dudley and his gang beat me, I let my grades fall below his. Nothing I did was good enough to make them happy. In the end, I knew they would never love me, but I just wanted them to stop hating me. But I wasn't good enough, just a worthless freak," he muttered bitterly.

He paused and she jumped in. "They were wrong!" she spat, appalled by his comments. "Evil, hateful people."

"Did you know that if you hear yourself called something enough times you start to believe it?" he asked.

With echoes of "buck toothed bookworm" echoing in her head, she nodded. "Yes, I know," she said quietly.

"It's a hard habit to break," he admitted.

"Are you willing to believe that it might be possible?" she pressed.

He shrugged. "I don't think I'm anything special, Hermione, but if you had told me over the summer that I would become the leader of dragons, I'd of said you were mental. I guess anything is possible. I suppose I should warn you, though. If you're going to insist on this, you're going to have to explain a lot. It's not like I have an experience with girls."

She raised an eyebrow and looked at him. "And I have a lot of experience with boys? Honestly, Harry, I think this is something we'll have to learn together."

He nodded and took a deep breath. "Can I ask you something?"

She eyed him curiously. "Of course."

"Can I hug you?" he said, then he blushed and looked away.

She beamed. "You can hug me whenever you like," she replied.

He wrapped his arms around her and rested his head against her shoulder. Her smile broadened even further when she heard him whisper. "You were the first person to give me a hug that I can remember. I've always loved your hugs since then."

Her own eyes misted up and she tightened her grip on him.

"YAY!" shouted Chekiath. "Are you going to mate now?"

Harry winced. "I wondered why he was being so quiet," he muttered.

Hermione stiffened in his arms, but he held her tight. "We're just going to have to get used to them, Hermione," he said softly. "You and Comaloth are a package deal, like Chekiath and I."

"Are you going to rip her bodice off, Harry?" asked Comaloth. "She seems to like parts of her books where the bodice gets ripped off in passion."

Hermione groaned and buried her head into Harry's shoulder. She was mortified!

"Erm, not today, Comaloth. I think it might be a little too chilly for that," Harry replied in confusion.

Hermione began to giggle when she realized that he had no clue what a bodice was.

An hour later they stood up and walked toward their dragons to return to the Weyr. They had spent the rest of the time talking and holding hands. Hermione was positively ecstatic. They weren't quite a couple, but they were very close. She understood him better now, and his behavior made more sense to her.

For Harry, it was a pretty confusing conversation, but he got the gist of it. Hermione was his best friend and she thought they could have more. He was willing to try for her. He really did like her and thought she was very pretty. His major worry was that he'd mess things up and end up hurting her and their friendship. There weren't many people he trusted enough to open up to, but she was at the top of that very small list.

As he mounted Chekiath, he also made a mental note to ask Sirius what a bodice was.

Campbeltown Weyr, April 13th...

Hermione and Harry came out of Between and slowly spiraled into land in front of Hanger Two. He noted Sirius, Albus and Lord Mills waiting for him to dismount and he frowned.

"Comaloth, tell Hermione that I'm sorry, but it looks like we won't be spending more time alone today," he muttered. "She's welcome to join me, but I suspect those three do not have good news."

"Of course, Weyrleader," Comaloth replied.

He walked over to the three, certain that Hermione was close behind him.

"Harry, I received a disturbing letter from Minerva today," Albus said by way of a greeting.

Harry paused in step. "What's wrong now?"

"It seems that a group of WDF men came to the school in an attempt to arrest Neville Longbottom. Minerva says the school had to take extreme measures to protect her and her class, killing one of the men in the process."

Hermione gasped behind him and he held out a hand to her. She stepped closer and took his hand in hers. He turned back to Dumbledore. "Did they take Neville?"

"No. Between Minerva and the school, they were chased from the castle without taking him."

Harry nodded and released Hermione hand. He turned in the direction of the hangars four, five and six, where a bulk of the dragons now made their Weyrs.

"Spath?" he called.

"Yes, Weyrleader?"

"I am in need of your advice, my friend. A wizard I know of is in danger of being imprisoned or worse," Harry explained. "I would like to think he is a friend, but I'm not sure."

"Weyrleader, traditionally anyone could petition the Weyrs for aid in obtaining justice. It was not our primary function, but it was one duty the Weyrs did perform."

"I see," Harry replied a bit unhappily.

"This displeases you, Weyrleader?"

"No, not really. But by the same token, I do not want the Weyrs to become a sanctuary for those trying to escape the injustice of the Wizarding World. We'd have to take in half the wizards in Britain if we did that," Harry replied.

"I think you know what answer you seek, Weyrleader," Spath said gently.

Harry nodded and heaved a sigh. "Yes, I do," he replied. "Thank you, my friend."

"We take care of our friends, Harry," Chekiath added softly. Unlike Spath's conversation, Chekiath spoke so all could hear him.

"Yes, we do," he replied with a smile for his dragon, then he turned his attention back to Albus. "Spath tells me that part of the traditional role of the Weyr is to help people who seek justice. Traditions have their place, but even Spath will admit that we are not in the same circumstances as the Weyrs of Pern. They were cut off from their home world and their technology and at the mercy of thread. They'd slipped back into a much simpler way of life. It was a choice they made, even if thread did catch them unawares.

"We are not the police. That isn't the role we're needed for. On the other hand, I will not turn away someone seeking refuge from injustice. If I did, I would have to kick Sirius, Narcissa and Albus from our Weyr. Albus, see that Neville is provided a portkey that will take him to the Security building. Place its destination in one of their cells, just in case someone uses it who shouldn't. Oh, and place an anti-apparation ward on the cell.

"I do not want our Weyr to become a haven for every wizard fleeing from the Ministry and their thugs. On the other hand, I am willing to allow those who are in danger to shelter here," he said firmly.

Albus nodded approvingly. It was a sensible precaution.

Harry turned and a sight caused him to stop in his tracks and stare. Sir Robert bustled across the tarmac with Narcissa Malfoy close behind him, carrying an armload of papers and books.

He glanced over to Sirius, who smirked at him, then shrugged. "Well?"

"She's behaving herself, for the most part. Narcissa has always been a bit obsessed with power, so when she talked to Sir Robert, she realized that the Weyr was going to have a power unlike anything Voldemort or Lucius could provide. I think she believes that by making herself useful, she'll have access to at least a small portion of that power."

He stared at Sirius for a moment before shaking his head. He glanced over to Hermione, who looked as bewildered as he did. He sighed "Fine, as long as she's not being a problem. Talk it over with the other adults and give her back her wand if you think you can trust her."

He turned and noted Sir Robert waving frantically to him from the entrance to the building they were using for his offices and workshops. He waved and took off in Sir Robert's direction with Hermione close behind.

"Is it always like this?" she asked.

"What do you mean?"

"It's a Saturday. Nearly everyone else is relaxing, except you," she said.

He stopped and looked at her tiredly. "I wish I could say this is unusual, but it isn't," he admitted.

"No wonder you seem so tired sometimes," she murmured.

Harry shrugged his shoulders and kept walking towards Sir Robert. As he did, he noted a nondescript sedan approaching from another direction. It was one he had come to recognize as used by the British Army when they wanted to move about inconspicuously.

The car was moving at a slow pace, obviously taking in the sights, such that they were. They had come from the north west section of the Weyr, where Sir Robert was setting up to break ground for a power station powered by dragon heated rocks.

"Good afternoon, Sir Robert," Harry called when only a few feet away. "Good afternoon, Mrs. Malfoy."

Chekiath, who had been following Harry and Hermione, suddenly bugled in warning and shimmered violently as he became invisible to everyone. Comaloth, who had been walking with him, copied his actions and Harry turned back to his dragon.

"Cheki?"

"Harry, there is a person in that machine who is dangerous to the Weyr," the dragon said firmly.

He looked shocked for a moment, then he nodded. "Weyr vanish," he ordered sharply. Around the Weyr every dragon shimmered and faded from view. Only the bonded could see their dragons and only Harry could see them all. It was a simple command that they had practiced only a few times, but it was effective. No matter where the dragons were or what they were doing, they invoked that magic that made them unnoticeable.

"My apologies, Sir Robert, but we need to hold an emergency council meeting. I don't know who is in that car, but I need you now in the administration building," Harry said tensely.

Sir Robert looked surprised, but he nodded. It was a weekend and he didn't really expect the Americans until Monday. That they showed up early was an inconvenience that he had hoped to offset by introducing them to Harry and the dragons.

"All right, Harry, I'll have one of my aides give them an overview of our proposed power plant. They can't expect too much, having arrived on a weekend. Once I'm done here I'll come to the meeting."

Harry nodded and reversed his course, while Sir Robert stood waiting for the car to stop.

On Harry's orders, Spath alerted members of the Weyr council and Captain Atkins to assemble in the main conference room of the Administration building. He further asked Momnarth, Spath and Chekiath to perch on the roof, so they could listen in and offer their own opinions.

"What are you going to do, Harry?" asked a very worried Hermione. She hadn't heard Chekiath's warning, so the reasoning behind this meeting was a mystery to her.

Harry glanced over and noted that Narcissa was following them, close enough to hear, but not so much that she was crowding them.

"Chekiath warned me that one of the men in that car was dangerous," he said tensely. His gaze moved to Narcissa. "You might as well join us in the meeting, Mrs. Malfoy. I'm not sure I trust you but anything that endangers the Weyr endangers you, as well."

"Strange bedfellows," she murmured with a slight smile, but she nodded, acknowledging his point.

He led them into the building and straight to the large conference room where they would meet. It was the first time Hermione had attended one of these meetings at his invitation, but she still felt a little out of place. So much was happening that she didn't really understand.

Harry stood waiting while the others filed in and took their seats, looking expectantly at him. The last to enter was Sir Robert, who was puffing slightly from his trip to the building.

"Sir Robert, who were the people in that sedan that you were waiting for?" Harry asked.

He blinked and looked expectantly to Narcissa, who was already passing him a slip of paper. "Thank you, my dear," he said, then he put on his glasses. "Let's see, we have the driver, who's part of Captain Atkins' detail, and the three members of NASA that the Americans sent over."

Lord Mills looked up in surprise. "But they weren't supposed to show up until Monday," he protested.

Sir Robert nodded. "Quite so, James, but they arrived early and they requested an earlier start. They were driving around the area where we're going to build the power plant. When I spotted Harry I invited him over. I thought that I could occupy them today by introducing them to the dragons."

Sir Robert turned back to Harry. "What ever is the problem, my boy? I haven't seen you this upset since that incident in Kenya."

Several members of the council winced. No one liked to talk about that time. But Sir Robert suffered from a scientist's perspective and rarely took into account the feelings of others. It wasn't deliberate or an attempt to be malicious, it was just the way he was.

"Sir," Harry began, "you are aware of the dragon ability to sense the trustworthiness of individuals. In fact, it was your actions with the Ministry of Defense that resulted in replacing our first Security Officer with Captain Atkins."

Sir Robert nodded uncomfortably. He knew about the ability, but without any way of measuring or testing it, he was uncomfortable relying on it. The request he made to the MoD had been a purely political move to ensure the dragons would continue trusting him.

Katherine looked up in surprise. No one had told her about that. She merely assumed she had replaced the previous officer so he could be assigned to some area they needed him in.

"Chekiath told me one of the people in that car was dangerous to us. This isn't a case like the one with that boy who was spying on the girls in his school. The dragons called him a criminal and unworthy of being a rider. Our former security officer was also unworthy of our trust, according to Spath. Never before has a dragon told me someone was dangerous. That has me worried," Harry said quietly.

"Could the person in question be a wizard?" asked Remus.

Harry shrugged. "I don't know. If they were British, I'd say probably not. These people are supposed to be scientists. I suppose it's possible an American wizard might study in normal subjects."

"Who are these people, Sir Robert?" asked Albus.

"We have a Doctor Steven Chan, a physicist who is an expert in radiant energies. Then there is Doctor Mildred O'Connor, astronomer/astrophysicist. It was thought she might be able to help us locate Pern in our night skies. She's bringing a connection to one of NASA's dedicated super computers to help figure that out. The

final member of the team is probably the most controversial. Doctor Milton Standish is a biologist who has spent more time as an administrator than he has as a scientist. He's noted as being one of the principle proponents of the Astrowolf theory."

Remus leaned forward in his chair. "Astrowolf?"

Sir Robert smiled. "No doubt you've attended the movie nights, Remus? Perhaps even had a television installed in your quarters?"

Remus nodded. He'd had a television installed in his room and had developed a fascination with the documentaries offered on the machine. Occasionally, Sirius came over with some asinine comedy that usually featured drinking, bare breasts and lots of potty humor.

"There are two major ideas involved when dealing with First Contact. The first idea is what I like to call the Star Trek vision. The aliens are benevolent, powerful and willing to share their technology freely. The second theory is probably more likely to be true. The Astrowolf theory suggests that intelligence is the mark of a predator and that intelligent species are apt to be aggressive."

"Standish was on the NASA panel that recommended any first contact be treated as a potential threat and that we should be prepared for a violent response if needed. His opinion was fairly unpopular, but NASA had to acknowledge that the Astrowolf is a valid concern," Sir Robert said in conclusion.

Harry frowned at Sir Robert, but he couldn't condemn a man he never met over an idea that everyone agreed had a fifty-fifty chance of being right.

"Chekiath, can you explain what you mean when you said he was dangerous?" asked Harry aloud.

"We can usually tell a lot about a person, Harry," Chekiath replied. "Some people are better than others. Smelly Dog and Wolf, for example. All dragons know they are as dedicated to you as you are to us. Only Hermione and May care more about you than they do. You should mate with them. It would make them very happy."

The group started laughing, while Harry and Hermione turned several shades of bright red.

"Chekiath," Harry hissed, trying to ignore the snickering of the adults.

"Oh, all right," Chekiath grumbled. "But you're taking this mating business far too serious. Kirteth's rider is troublesome, but he loves his dragon and all dragons in general. He has big ideas in his small head, but you stepped on his tail very well. For now, he will behave because Kirteth will make him behave.

"Boat Guy wasn't trustworthy. Sooner or later he would have told someone about us. Again, he wasn't a danger, but his mouth wasn't under his control. Brown Runner is trustworthy and she greatly likes Smelly Dog. Wolf thinks Smelly Dog is afraid of her."

Harry smirked at Sirius, who was sinking low in his chair and shooting death glares at Remus for telling tales.

Harry shook his head and looked up towards the ceiling. "And this person, Cheki?" he asked again.

"Is dangerous. I don't know which one of the three it was, but I don't like them."

That last statement immediately sobered all present. Never had a dragon been so emphatic as to state they didn't like someone.

"What do we do?" asked James.

"Easy," Harry replied. "Don't let them back into the Weyr."

"Harry," Sir Robert said softly, "these people are here by agreement between our two governments. We can't just deny them access when we have already agreed to their visit."

Harry turned to look at Sir Robert. "Very well. Since the British government invited them, I'll let you deal with them. However, I will not expose my Weyr to a potential threat. They are due to be here for a week so I'll move us to Disko for that week."

"But but they came here to see the dragons!" protested Sir Robert.

"If I may," Albus interrupted placatingly. "Perhaps the first thing to do is determine which of these Americans is the one the dragons don't

like, then have Prime Minister Major ask that that individual be recalled and a replacement sent."

Harry nodded, then he turned to Sir Robert, "Have these Americans been told about the dragons?"

"They have been briefed on the subject, probably before they left America," Sir Robert said.

Harry scowled and stared at the floor for a moment. "All right, here's how we'll handle this. Let one or two of the dragons figure out which person is the problem. As soon as we know, we'll isolate that person from the others and explain to the Yanks what the problem is. Lord Mills can talk to Prime Minister Major and request he be sent home.

"In the meantime, the rest of the Weyr will run long distance jump drills. If the dragons agree, we'll let the other two meet with them after we've dealt with the problem.

"Hopefully by Tuesday morning our problem person will be on their way home or in custody and we'll be able to get back to regular routines," Harry said firmly.

Nods all around the room signaled their acceptance. As far as plans went, it was very tame.

"Since we're all together, does anyone have any business they need to bring up?" Harry asked.

"I do," James said. "It's not pressing, but I need you to swing by my office and sign the papers on your new account."

Harry turned to James with a confused look. "My new account?" he repeated stupidly.

James glanced at Hermione with a look of surprise.

Harry turned, following his gaze, and settled on Hermione, who was looking very uncomfortable. "Hermione?"

"Well, you see, we wanted to make sure you got paid back. We heard that you emptied your trust account to buy the sheep and flight clothes and other supplies. It didn't seem fair to May and I,"

she admitted. "When we started working on salaries, we thought it was only right for you to be reimbursed for your expenses."

"That was very nice of her," Chekiath said privately. "I told you she would make a good mate. She's looking out for your interests."

Harry nodded with a bit of a sigh. He hadn't expected to be paid back for his expenses in starting the Weyr.

"So, Harry's got his money back?" pressed Sirius.

James nodded a bit reluctantly. "Yes. I've even picked him up a wallet with a hundred pounds and a debit card drawn off of his Barclay's account,"

"Excellent," murmured Sirius, who then turned to Harry. "I have a piece of business. It's an issue that keeps cropping up and doesn't seem to want to go away. It's a Saturday and most of the riders are either in town shopping, taking in a movie, or just goofing off. Except for you and Hermione. Even May is off visiting with her family. So, go sign the papers James has for you Harry, get your money and that card thing, then take the car Katherine has arranged for you. Take Hermione out for dinner. Relax and just be a teenager for today."

Harry looked around, then he turned to James, who was nodding. "It's good advice, lad. You've been working really hard. A few hours off is just what the doctor ordered."

He glanced at Hermione, who seemed to be trying to suppress a smile. "Hermione?" he asked.

She looked at him, suddenly shy, but she nodded. "It's not exactly how I figured our first date would be set up, but it could be worse. I'd love to go with you."

He glanced down at his clothing, then grimaced. "All right, let me take care of this paperwork and change into something other than my flight suit."

He walked from the room with Hermione hot on his heels.

Once he had mentioned it, she realized that her flight suit, helmet and jacket were not exactly what one wore on a date. For the first time in her life, she realized she didn't know what to wear. She never realized she could be such a girl.

Back in the conference room, the adults all looked toward Dan and Emma.

"Harry and Hermione are dating?" said Dan with a darkening expression.

"Not yet they aren't, but I suspect that's why she took him off this morning, to talk to him," James said with a chuckle.

Emma stood and smiled sweetly at her husband. "Don't make this any more difficult than it is, Dan. She's growing up and we both know she's been sweet on him for a long time. Now you'll have to excuse me. If I know my daughter, and I do, she's currently in a panic because she has no idea what to wear on a date."

Dan seemed to deflate to the laughter of the others. When Sirius shot him a wink, he turned away with a grumble.

Office of the Minister for Magic, April 15th...

"Minister, Senior Auror Dawlish wishes to speak with you," a secretary said quietly from the doorway.

Cornelius looked up and frowned. He still had to figure out what to do with Dawlish. The man had failed to control his Aurors. Now the man was reduced to being in charge of the four man security detail surrounding Cornelius.

He sighed, but he needed the man as a foil against Delores and her plotting. "Very well, send him in."

John Dawlish entered the office looking rather upset. "Minister, I tried to deliver the note as you ordered, but the manor was sealed off."

Cornelius started at him. "Sealed off? What do you mean it was sealed off?"

Dawlish swallowed nervously, "I couldn't talk to Tiberius directly, but Lord Ogden sent an elf with a note asking what I wanted. I replied that I was there to escort Lord Ogden to a meeting with you as you requested. The elf came back with a note that he would not have anything further to do with a Ministry that is trying to break the old noble families."

Cornelius blinked and stared at Dawlish for a moment. Ogden was an ally and a valuable supporter of his.

"Minister, there's more," Dawlish said.

Cornelius raised his eyebrows. "More?"

Dawlish nodded emphatically. "Yes, sir. I visited the manors of the Flints, Tuscany, Abbots and Flynns. Some are deserted, others have erected war wards. There are rumors, Minister, terrible rumors of the noble families calling in old oaths and invoking blood debts. The McMillans have called for a conclave of their clan. The last time they did that, nearly six hundred years ago, they led a revolt against the Ministry!"

Cornelius stood and paced for a moment muttering. "What can be causing this? We haven't really done anything!"

With a few exceptions, he knew that Delores and her crowd had not started culling out the undesirable elements of the Wizengamot yet. So far they were supposed to be gathering information on the bulk of the Wizengamot. Sure, a few had been eliminated, but he hadn't authorized going after anyone major yet.

"Minister?"

He whirled and pinned with a glare Dawlish. "Yes?"

"There is a rumor that some people from the WDF forced their way into Hogwarts and tried to seize the Longbottom heir. There's a reporter from the Daily Prophet sitting in your outer office hoping to ask you about it. They say the school protected Professor McGonagall and killed a member of the WDF. They also say the WDF did this in front of a bunch of second year students. Ravenclaws and Slytherin's, I believe."

"Damn," Cornelius muttered, then he glared at Dawlish. "Go down to Delores' office and tell her I want to know how this happened! This is a disaster! She's turned the entire Wizengamot against the Ministry!"

Dawlish dashed from the room and Cornelius paced for a moment longer. He had long played the part of the bumbling Minister. It allowed him to milk Malfoy and others for bribes, which he had neatly squirreled away. All of that had changed when Umbridge took Malfoy out of the picture. Malfoy had effectively blocked his seizing greater control with all the blackmail material he had amassed on him.

Umbridge had inadvertently removed that monkey from his back. In doing so, she'd given him an intoxicating view of the power he could wield if he was just willing to grasp it.

It meant controlling Delores, but that was all right. He knew she was an ass kisser with no real talent other than being able to find a path to the top. He leaned on her hard and bent her to his will, but now, his plans for being in absolute control seemed to be slipping away.

"Damn, damn, damn," he muttered before throwing himself into his seat. He touched a crystal on his desk and as soon as his secretary arrived, he hit her with an imperio curse. He needed some relaxation and she would do admirably.

A nondescript cottage in Northern Wales...

Alejandro Croaker looked down at the parchments laid out before him and scowled darkly. Thanks to his listening charms he could see the Ministry fracturing but he was unsure what to do about it.

He had received a letter from Dumbledore that basically told him that events were now out of their hands. Things were spiraling out of control and nothing anyone could do would stop it now.

He had managed to contact some of the former aurors, but with the muggles now involved, there was little hope he could offer them.

Dumbledore admitted that the wizards he had wanted to use had been taken into service of the British government. That news had him shuddering. He hadn't been aware of exactly what the normals knew, but apparently they knew far more than he thought.

He waved a wand, duplicating the parchments, then he prepared a package to send to Minerva, who would forward them on to Dumbledore with Fawkes. The muggles were going to wreck their society, but at this point, there wasn't much worth saving. He could only hope that when it came time to rebuild, he'd be able to help guide that rebuilding.

In the meantime, he'd use Dumbledore to funnel the information he had to the muggles. After that, he had little to do with his time. Perhaps he'd dip a toe into muggle religion. Though he'd have to pick one first, and that might be more effort than it was worth. Perhaps crossword puzzles would be more amusing.

Campbeltown Kitchen Hall...

Hermione stepped into the hall and noted that the boys were clustered at one table, the girls at another. The adults and couples were seated at tables around the room. She didn't spot Harry, so she went to sit at the girls table when she noted several waving her over.

Susan Bones grinned at her. "You do know that there are several girls here that are just waiting for the chance to replace you."

Hermione smiled in reply. "I think they would be very disappointed, honestly. Harry is really sweet, but right now he's very high maintenance."

Luna nodded knowingly and several girls looked confused.

"Look, Harry isn't a demanding boyfriend. In fact, it's just the opposite. If you let him lead, you'll go through months where he's just content to hold hands."

Several of the girls looked surprised.

"Luna pointed out he's afraid of being hurt and that's true," May pointed out thoughtfully, "but he's also convinced that he isn't worth loving."

"And Chekiath didn't change his mind?" blurted Mariah. Several of the girls glared at her for saying the dragon's name.

"No, not entirely," Chekiath replied. "I love him and he loves me, but I am not human and cannot give him human love. I know he greatly cares for several of you, but he's afraid of doing anything that might get him hurt or hurt any of you."

"We're sorry to disturb you, Chekiath," Susan said softly.

"You did not disturb me, Susan. I, too, worry about Harry. He needs to be building his stable of females to mate with."

Luna smiled and the rest of the girls looked scandalized.

"Chekiath," hissed Hermione. "Humans don't do that."

"Oh, very well, Hermione," Chekiath replied with a sigh, "But I think you're making this far more complicated than it need be."

There was a moment of silence before they sensed Chekiath withdrawing from their minds and they all breathed a sigh of relief.

"You know, Hermione, that dragon is right inside Harry's mind in a way none of us could ever be," Luna said.

"Yes, I know that."

Luna's smile broadened. "Did it ever occur to you that his dragon might know what his rider needs or wants more than you do? Perhaps know even more than he does? Or is willing to admit to himself?"

"Luna," Hermione exclaimed. "I'm not sharing Harry!"

"I would," Mariah said, then chuckled to herself. "I know he's unsure of what to do, but I bet once he does, he's going to be a real tiger in bed."

Hermione blushed brightly. She thought Mariah was probably right in that regard, but she wasn't ready to find out and Harry certainly wasn't any closer to being ready.

For the first time several of the girls, including Hermione, considered Luna and Mariah's comments and wondered about it.

"I'm not going to harp on this, Hermione," Luna said seriously. "But I want you to remember that he might not be able to control himself. Also, you need to ask yourself what you'll do if Comaloth rises and Harry's away on Weyr business."

Shocked looks met Luna's question and she nodded. "Now you see what I'm saying. We all agree that Harry is very strong willed, but each of us will have to face the fact that not too many months after Harry's dragon rises, ours will rise to mate for the first time, too."

Luna scooped up some eggs on her fork and shrugged. "In a way, it will be nice to get it out of the way. We spend half our teen years worrying over that moment. Perhaps the dragons are right and we really are over-complicating what should be a simple thing."

May turned to Luna with a worried look. "Has anyone mentioned this to the guys?"

Luna shook her head. "I haven't. Do you think we should?"

"I think maybe we should," Susan said softly. "Draco and Michelle are really tight, but think about how they'd feel if they were caught by surprise by this. Michelle knows, but I don't think she has considered what it really means for her and Draco."

"Why don't we talk about this later," Karen Khan said softly. "Harry just came in."

Harry stood in the doorway and looked around until he spotted Hermione. She smiled at him and motioned for him to join her at the open spot next to her seat. He nodded and went to pick up a tray and some breakfast from the buffet.

A few minutes later, he sat down and placed his items around his plate before putting his tray on the pile at the end of the table.

Karen Khan sat across from him and frowned at his plate. "Harry, do you mind if I ask you something?"

He looked up from his eggs and toast. "I suppose you can," he replied guardedly.

She smiled at him. "I've watched you and nearly every morning you get eggs, toast, bacon or sausages, and a roll. And every morning the first thing you do is butter the roll. In fact, even when you vary your breakfast, you always get a roll and never eat it. Usually Hermione ends up picking at it while she has her nose in some book."

Hermione looked up from the book she had just opened and her eyes narrowed suspiciously.

Harry laughed quietly and nodded to Hermione. "For four years now I've eaten breakfast across from Hermione and very quickly learned that when she opens her book, she thinks she's done with breakfast, but really isn't. I get the roll and I place it where she can reach it and every morning it's the same thing. She picks at it while she reads. The few times I haven't had a roll, she's complained about being hungry before lunch."

Hermione stared at Harry in shock. "I just thought I picked up that roll," she sputtered.

He smiled at her smugly. "I know."

She shook her head and tried to act put out, but her heart wasn't in it. It was an act that was so Harry like. He did something simply because she was his friend. He would laugh at her if she said it aloud, but now that she realized it, she thought it was really sweet of him. Judging from the looks of the girls sitting around them, they agreed with her.

It amazed her that in four years she had never noticed. It also amazed her that Harry did it because he cared that much. Even if he didn't understand it and couldn't talk about his feelings, he still acted on them unconsciously.

He arched an eyebrow and used his finger to gently push the small plate with the buttered roll on it towards her. She smiled and picked up the roll and took a dainty bite, then she turned back to her book.

Campbeltown Weyr, Building #15...

Sir Robert fidgeted nervously with his tie and Narcissa frowned. "Robert," she said softly, "keep that up and you're going to look a right mess."

He stared and nodded at her. "I'm sorry, my dear, it's just all this business about dangerous people. Suddenly I feel like I've been thrown into a James Bond film."

She nodded uncertainly. Cinema was something new to her. She had watched a few movies in the social hall, but she still felt uncomfortable around the others. Only Sir Robert had gone out of his way to reach out to her.

She was very grateful to him for his attitude toward her. He had taken her under his wing and she did what she could to help him as a personal assistant might. She made sure he ate regularly and that he dressed warmly. She kept track of his appointments and made sure he had all the papers he needed. Even though he was at least forty years older than she was, they were forming a tight bond of friendship that surprised her. She liked him as a friend, even if she didn't understand the things he did.

The door opened and Millicent Bulstrode entered the room. Narcissa marveled at the change in the pure blood girl who had once been the epitome of Slytherin house. Now she smiled a lot more often and joked around with people. She remembered the girl when she had visited the Manor before. She had always been a dour, reserved girl who reminded her of her own mother.

Millicent would always be a big girl, but with the change of lifestyle, she was discovering an attractiveness about herself that she enjoyed. Two of the muggle riders were interested in her and she often spent her evenings with them in the social hall. For Millicent, the biggest change in her opinion was that she had friends, instead of Slytherin allies. Even Hermione was a friend now and she really liked that.

Milli smiled at Sir Robert. "Sir Robert, Chekiath, Momnarth and Tarianth are all perched on the roof. We have nothing to worry about. Captain Atkins has borrowed one of our offices for the morning. She's nearby with three people of her special detail. Harry and Sirius are also with her."

Sir Robert nodded and smiled. "Yes, that is reassuring," he muttered mostly to himself.

"Sir Robert," Millicent said, holding out a clipboard, "would you check this? I've run that calculation several times and I keep getting a decay rate that suggests a five year radiant span before there's any significant decline."

He beamed at the girl and took the clipboard. "We'll turn you into a scientist yet, Milli, my dear," he said proudly, then he turned to Narcissa, who stared at Millicent in shock. "The Weyrleader asked Millicent to learn more about our experiments, so I have been tutoring her on just the portions of math and science she needs to understand what we're doing. I don't know how Harry knew it, but Millicent here has quite a talent for science."

Millicent blushed and smiled shyly. It struck Narcissa that there was a pretty girl there after all. She had a very pretty smile that before coming to the Weyr was almost never seen.

"The people are arriving, Milli," said Tarianth from her perch on the roof. At the same moment, a small bell rang announcing the arrival of their guests.

"I'll check these later my, dear," Sir Robert said, handing her back the clipboard. "I'm sure your math is right. I haven't caught you in a mistake in weeks."

Milli nodded and walked over to an old beat up desk, where she sat and started to transcribe her figures to a notebook. Sir Robert was a stickler for record keeping and Milli was following his instructions to the letter. She had been surprised when Harry asked her to help him, but now she was glad that he had. She was finding the work almost as interesting as her dragon and that was saying a lot!

In a nearby office, Harry sat flipping through a magazine, while Katherine and Sirius talked quietly nearby. Harry liked to think they were negotiating about being a couple, when in fact Katherine was trying to help Sirius overcome his fear of getting involved with her.

He had been a renowned ladies man during his later Hogwarts years, but the years in Azkaban had left a deep imprint on him and eroded his confidence in himself.

Finally, Harry tossed the magazine to one side and looked at the pair. "Sirius, just go out with her already! What's the worse that can happen? You find out you're not right for each other? You'd still be friends with her," he said. "Your luck, she'll discover just how infantile you can be and decide she's better off adopting Padfoot as a pet, rather than having you for a boyfriend."

Sirius turned to stare at Harry in astonishment. "Oh, like you'd know all about it, would you?" he retorted.

Harry flushed and shook his head. "No, I wouldn't," he admitted. "In fact, Hermione nearly beat me over the head with the idea. But she understands, and I think Katherine does too. She's not going to push you too fast or too hard."

Katherine nodded with a small smile, then turned to Sirius and with a completely straight face she repeated a phrase that the dragons had said on several occasions, to Harry's great embarrassment. "Listen to the Weyrleader. His words are wise."

Harry groaned and buried his face in his hands. Chekiath and several other dragons had taken to saying that when Harry was trying to make a point and getting worked up about it. The problem was that the dragons weren't teasing him like the others thought. They truly felt that way and it embarrassed him terribly.

Sirius chuckled at his godson's discomfort, then he turned back to Katherine. He was about to speak when he was interrupted.

"Harry, those people have arrived," Chekiath said privately.

"They're here," Harry said softly.

Katherine reached for her walkie talkie. "All units, subjects have arrived," she said.

Sirius stood and walked over to Harry and messed up his hair. "You got lucky," he said softly.

Harry grumbled and pushed his hand away, then tried to fix his hair.

"The woman isn't a problem. She's excited to be here and very happy," Chekiath announced to Harry.

"It's not the woman," he repeated quietly.

"One of the men is worried about a machine he's hiding and hopes it's functioning properly," Chekiath said in confusion.

Harry scowled and looked at Katherine. "Chekiath says one of the men has a machine he's hiding and he hopes it's functioning properly?"

Katherine returned his confused look, then her eyes widened. "We haven't done a security screening on these people. We just assumed the Yanks did that," she said, then she turned to her walkie talkie. "Base, activate the wide band receiver."

Sirius and Harry exchanged a look then looked back at Katherine.

She shook her head. "We've been so concerned that we protect the dragons and keep them secret that it never occurred to us to protect the secret of the hot rocks. We could be looking at either national or industrial espionage."

"We've picked up a signal on the receiver, Captain. Something close by is transmitting a steady carrier," a voice said over the radio.

Katherine frowned, then opened her briefcase and extracted a sidearm and holster, which she hastily put on. She checked the weapon carefully, then turned to Harry. "Ask Chekiath to tell Sir Robert to escort his guests to the back of the building to meet the dragons."

"Katherine," Harry hissed in protest.

"Harry, we don't know which one of the two guys we need to worry about. Once outside, one of the dragons should be able to easily identify which person it is and we can arrest them," she replied patiently.

Harry reluctantly nodded and passed the message to Chekiath.

In the lab, Sir Robert was busy explaining the Slow Decline Thermal Sources when he paused for a second.

"Excuse me, Sir Robert," Millicent said. "But they are ready for you and your party out back."

"Thank you, my dear," he said, smiling brightly. He then turned to his guests. "Now I know we have quite a lot to show you on the technical side, but I also know you've been itching to meet with our friends. If you would follow me, I will take you to meet them."

Sir Robert turned and he glanced nervously at Narcissa and Millicent. Millicent looked at him and nodded.

She really didn't understand what was happening, but Narcissa knew. She was watching the three American scientists like a hawk.

The dragons moved to reposition themselves on the building, while Harry and the others discretely followed Sir Robert and his party.

They exited the building and walked toward a large grassy field. The area of the old airfield was very isolated from the other buildings. According to Captain Atkins, it had been used by both the US and British military during the height of the cold war, but no one knew what they did in the buildings.

Harry, Katherine and Sirius waited just inside the door, while several of Katherine's wizard detail were outside, concealed by spells.

"It's the large, round man who has the box, Harry," Chekiath said.

Harry glanced out the window and looked towards the ceiling. "You're sure, mate?"

"Yes. He has something in that box he's holding that he's worried about. He's fearful it might be discovered," replied Chekiath.

"Chekiath says it's the large, round man," Harry murmured.

Katherine looked out the window. She could see the two men quite clearly and was surprised by what the dragons were telling them. "Primary target is the large fellow with the equipment case," Katherine said into her communications unit.

She waited a moment longer while Sir Robert spoke to his guests. He gestured wildly and they all turned to look in one direction, away from the building. "Go," Katherine ordered.

There was a flash of red light and Doctor Steven Chan crumpled to the ground, to the astonishment of his companions. Two men appeared, then a moment later, a truck roared around the building and came to a halt. Several of Captain Atkin's security detail jumped from the back of the truck and placed Chan in handcuffs.

Harry was shocked to see Narcissa move to place herself between Sir Robert and the others as soon as the stunner was fired.

"I demand to know what is going on here!" exclaimed the older man.

"Doctor Standish," Sir Robert said, "I can assure you, you're perfectly safe. But I'm afraid we were told about a problem involving one of the people on your team."

Standish frowned. He was about to speak when Chekiath, Tarianth and Momnarth appeared on the roof overlooking the small crowd of people. All three dragons sprang aloft and glided to the ground near Sir Robert.

Mildred O'Connor gasped and fainted.

When she hit the ground, Sirius looked at Katherine with a smug grin.

"All right, fine" she muttered. "I owe you lunch."

"Part of the problem is in that box," Chekiath announced.

Standish took an alarmed step back from the dragons. "It spoke!" he exclaimed.

Katherine walked over to the brief case and examined it. "Doctor Standish, can you open this? It's locked."

Standish frowned. "Locked? No, I don't have a key. There is no reason for it to be locked. It only contains some basic measuring equipment and some software."

Katherine nodded unhappily. That complicated matters. "I'm afraid I'm going to have to detain all of your party then, sir," she said. "The simple fact is that I don't know what I'm dealing with here."

"Brown Runner, only the man is dangerous. These others are confused and frightened, but they do not know what he was doing." Momnarth announced.

Sirius cast an enervate on Doctor O'Connor and the woman slowly sat up.

Katherine sighed and reluctantly nodded. Her training said to arrest all of them and sort it out in a controlled environment. The dragons vouching for two of them wasn't something she had considered. "Very well."

Standish looked at her, surprised. "You'll accept the say so of a creature?"

Chekiath stomped up to the man and he flinched back from the smoke puffing from his nostrils. Chekiath was now the largest dragon in the Weyr and while his rate had slowed, he was still growing.

"We are not beasts!" he said with a bit of a growl.

"Doctor Standish, I would remind you that you are here as guests and one of your party is here under suspicious circumstances. I would suggest you put your bigotry aside, since the dragons and their riders are your hosts, not the British government, who are our allies in this place," Harry said coldly.

Sir Robert winced as Harry publicly claimed the autonomy and the authority he had been asking for all long. It was an important step for Harry and his people, but he had hoped it would come under better circumstances.

"Milt damn it, shut up!" hissed O'Connor from the ground. "Please, we obviously got off on the wrong foot here. Steve was a last minute assignment to this task, so none of us really know him well. And... are you really from another world?"

It was impossible to ignore the wonder, and the plea, in her voice.

Chekiath turned his large head towards the woman. He noted that she was still seated on the cold ground and that she flinched back in fear when he turned his large head toward her. "I am from this world. But the Mother of all dragons came from Pern many many turns ago. I do not know Pern except from the memories she gave us, but I do know this world. It is my home and the home to my rider."

There was a flash of memory in which a smaller than normal G class appeared in the sky. "That is the world of the great Mother," Chekiath said. "We honor her and her home world, but this is our world now."

O'Connor looked at Chekiath with unmistakable awe on her face. "Thank you," she whispered. It had been a brief flash of memory, only a mere handful of seconds long, but to her trained eye she could spot some of the many differences, indicating the view wasn't of their sun. For an astronomer who had grown up dreaming of other worlds, Chekiath's memory was a precious gift.

Chekiath bobbed his head at her and pulled back from the woman. "You are welcome."

Katherine gestured and two of her regular detail carefully picked up the equipment case and put it in the truck, then they cuffed Chan before picking him up and moving him into the truck, as well. With the contents of the box unknown, they would treat it as a possible bomb.

Army ordinance specialists would be called in to examine the box, while Army intelligence tried to figure out what they were dealing with. She didn't know Sirius had a bottle of veritaserum in his pocket and Harry had told him to use it anyway he could to get answers.

"Might I suggest we go back inside where we can discuss these events?" asked Sir Robert. "I don't know about the rest of you, but it's still chilly and I daresay Doctor O'Connor would be more comfortable on a chair than the cold ground."

O'Connor looked down in shock, then quickly climbed to her feet. She had been so intent on watching the dragons that she hadn't even realized she was on the ground until someone mentioned it.

Katherine nodded to Harry, who waved, then she turned to the truck and climbed into the cab. She'd ride back to the security office and start the process of informing her government that they had a problem with the American delegation.

Harry watched the truck pull away, then he turned to the others. He noted that most had already entered the building. Narcissa and Sirius were speaking intently, so he went over to join them.

"I'm trying, Sirius, but it's not easy for me," he heard her say.

Harry stepped up to the pair. "No, it isn't easy and no one has made it any easier. But thank you, Mrs. Malfoy. I saw what you did back there," he said, interrupting their conversation.

Sirius looked up and frowned. "What did I miss?"

"When they took down that Yank, she moved to stand so that Sir Robert was blocked from him."

Sirius looked at Harry in shock for a moment, then turned to Narcissa, who shrugged in reply to his unspoken question.

"Sir Robert has been the only person to have anything remotely kind to say to me since I arrived. He's a bit off, but he's a nice gentleman and certainly a refreshing change from the types that Lucius used to bring home."

Harry nodded. "Whatever your reason, thank you. Sir Robert is one of our biggest allies and we cannot afford to lose him."

With that, he turned and entered the building.

When she turned to Sirius, he shook his head, then apparated away. He had to catch up with Katherine and find out what he could about their prisoner.

While Pern lore lends credence to the idea, Wing ranks and the discipline exhibited by the Weyrs are the real reason why so many felt the Weyrs were militaristic in nature. In fact, numerous researchers have shown otherwise, but popular opinion is hard to fight. Even when the Weyr was thrown open in 2002 to both BBC

and National Geographic documenters, the opinion persisted. It's only when you look at the record and note that the Weyr has had just three military encounters in the last twenty five years that one realizes the truth. Three encounters out of nearly thirty diplomatic crises is not the mark of a militaristic nation.

Excerpted from *The Weyrs of Earth* by Remus John Lupin, published 2040.

Author's notes and Mockeries:

- WAIT! Alright alright. I hear you, bitching and moaning about Hermione and Harry. But this isn't exactly what you think it is. For one thing they ain't even sixteen yet. For another Harry's reaction was kind of diffident to the whole thing. He likes girls, but he and Hermione aren't really having a relationship yet. Yet? What do I mean by yet? I'm not telling. It's my story and you'll have to keep reading, but I'm tired of Harry finding the love of his life and declaring his undying love at six years old. This time they are going to have work for it.

As for the pairing for Harry. Well it's already decided and honestly, while a lot of people have told, begged and threatened to see their favorite pairing, it ain't going to happen anytime soon. Harry is not quite fifteen. That's awful young for him for him to commit to someone. Besides, the dragons will have a definite say in what happens.

- Fire Lizards were an important part of Pern Lore and they added a sense of entertainment to the tale. Unfortunately the way that the dragons arrived on Earth precludes the possibility of Fire Lizards, at least until people find Pern again.

- Bigmac2759, we appreciate the ear plug suggestion, but do you have any idea of what to use when she's playing with her anti-matter toys?

- GBTTown, emotionally stunted? Do you know a 14yr old that isn't emotionally stunted?

- jules3677 raises an interesting point. What do you call a group of dragons? We have been referring to them in two different ways. A Weyr and as a clan, generally we used clan to refer to the dragons

under control of a Senior Dragon and Weyr to refer to a place where dragons reside. Is it right? I don't know. :) But I'll still with that for now because it's easier than going back and editing content I've already posted.

- vl100butch, a Weyr commissary would make sense and will probably be installed when there are several hundred riders and others living and working there. Right now it got far too few people to make it economically sound. Someday not too far, but not today.

- Lady of the Hunt, Harry's interaction with the girls is forced. Chekiath is pushing for him to pick one or more girls to mate with. The girls and their dragons are all interested, but Harry's FOURTEEN years old. Even with Sirius tutoring him do you honestly expect him to be smooth and suave with the girls at his age?

- Punishment. No dragon will allow their rider to be harmed by another. Public flogging is not going to be allowed by a dragon so the people suggesting such draconic punishments can forget it.

- Narcissa will play a role in this story but she's not going to be a villain.

- Romulus Lupin, No Tonks will not play a role in this story. We have picked someone out for Remus who we think is a nice change from the constant Remus/Tonks pairing. Honestly at this point in the time line I am unsure if Tonks would have been a full time Auror or just an Auror trainee, we didn't see Tonks until the summer between fourth and fifth year and by then she was described as a new auror. But since she doesn't have a role to play it really doesn't matter.

- Well since I've reached the end of the limit for my notes, I'll close here. I limit both notes and disclaimer to one page each in Open Office Writer and that's it. I want more story than notes and disclaimer.

Standard Disclaimer:

Alyx ran into the room all wild eyed and in a state of panic. Spotting Bob sitting calmly at his computer she zeroed in on her prey like a priest chasing a small boy. No, strike that, we didn't say that. Er. What we meant was she homed in on the unsuspecting Bob like lust controlled heat seeking missile.

With an amazing leap, she jumped into the air and ripped off her clothes at the same time. She landed in Bob's lap xhgehe...

"WHAT ARE YOU DOING?" screeched Alyx, smacking him in the back of his head.

Bob looked up in startlement and gulped loud enough for the people in the back row to hear him. You know, the folks too cheap to pay for the good seats? Cheap bastards!

"Erm... I'm writing the disclaimer," replied Bob.

"The disclaimer for what? A low grade porn novel written by a teenager?"

Bob blushed and looked at his computer forlornly. "No it would have gotten better, there was a cameo of Sean Connery, the Pope, and Abraham Lincoln the famous umpire slayer," Bob said, then he paused for a moment and thought. "There was also a pool filled with marshmallows and a blow torch, although I'm not sure what you had in mind for the blow torch."

Alyx threw up her hands in the air and turned to the audience. "I swear I haven't a clue where he gets this stuff from! Everyone knows you never fill a pool with marshmallows and use a blow torch on them. You'd use an electric arc welder!"

Bob shrugged. "Don't look at me, I just record you when you mumble in your sleep and write it down."

Alyx turned and stared at him. "I don't say those things. Do I?"

In the front row, Harry turned to Chekiath, "I don't think they are ever going to get around to saying they don't own Harry Potter or the Dragonriders of Pern."

"I think you're right Harry," replied the dragon. "But if Alyx gets too dangerous, Bob can always ask me to eat her."

"What did I say about eating people? We don't do that do we?"

"Have you seen Ronald Weasley anywhere in this story?"

Harry stopped and paled. "I thought he had just run away with Goyle. Ummm I think I better start the story before things get out of hand."

Up on the stage Bob was playing a recording of Alyx's sleep talking and illustrating them using sock puppets while Alyx wept.

It had been noted that sometimes the dragons could actually set rocks burning. In fact some of the earliest reserves employed people to banish such rocks. It wasn't until the mid 19th century and the creation of a fire suppression ward that the reserves were able to do away with such concerns. The fire suppression ward is the second most important ward used on reserves today.

Excerpt from Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find them by Newt Scamander. Published 1927.

#10 Downing Street, London, April 16th...

"Mister Prime Minister?"

John Major looked up from his papers. "Yes?"

"Sir Robert March and Lord Mills are here to see you. They have a Captain Atkins with them and say it's most urgent."

"Send them in," he said, then he gratefully closed the file folder on budget cuts.

"Gentlemen," he said with a bit of a smile. "And lady," he added apologetically. "Please be seated. What brings you here today?"

The two men looked to Captain Atkins and she sighed, knowing this was more in her area of expertise than theirs. "Sir, you are aware that the dragons are very capable of judging a person's character?"

Major nodded thoughtfully. "Yes, Sir Robert has briefed me on their ability."

Katherine leaned forward in her seat. "Sir, the people from NASA arrived at Campbeltown early on Saturday. During that visit, one of our dragons announced that one of their party was dangerous. Given that information, we sent them away, citing scheduling problems, while we tried to understand what the dragons were telling us."

Katherine hesitated for a moment, then she plunged on. "Sir, what I am about to tell you now is fact, but it would never be acceptable to any court. The dragons identified the individual in question and part of my special detachment stunned the man. We took him to our security office where we gave him some coffee laced with a magical truth serum."

She wasn't going to admit that Sirius had slipped the man the drug. She was rather put out with him over it, but Harry stomped on her hard for chewing out Sirius when he was just doing what he was told.

"The man turned out to be a Chinese agent. He'd been assigned to work at and spy on NASA and when he was assigned to the delegation he was ordered to find out as much as possible. He was caught with a number of recording devices, as well as a pistol. We explained our findings to the head of the American delegation, who is appalled at what has happened.

"The dragons are quite clear that the other Americans were completely unaware of what was going on under their noses."

Major scowled heavily. "Recommendations?"

Katherine shrugged. "I suggest we turn him over to the American FBI attache, or at least inform them of what has happened. Despite the illegal use of truth serum, the recording devices and pistol are enough to declare him persona non-grata."

Major held up a hand and Katherine fell silent. He turned slightly and pressed a button on his phone. "Sir?" said a voice from the speaker.

"Contact Ambassador Madison at the American Embassy and ask that he and his legal attache come to my office first thing in the

morning. Please tell him this is a priority meeting and schedule it before my morning brief. We'll need at least a half an hour."

"Yes sir, I'll do that right away," replied his secretary.

He nodded in satisfaction and released the button, then he turned back to the others. "And the other Americans?"

Sir Robert grinned. "Doctor O'Connor is practically ready to give up her citizenship so that she can stay and spend more time with the dragons. Doctor Standish is finding his visit to also be an eye opening experience. Unfortunately, we have a biologist and an astronomer, and while Doctor O'Connor is a fine cosmologist, she lacks the background in applied physics that Doctor Chan was going to provide. I think the Americans will try to find a replacement for Chan."

"Is that really necessary?" asked Major.

Sir Robert nodded. "Despite his intentions, sir, Doctor Chan was a recognized expert on radiant energies. With all of the work the Americans have done in high energy physics in the last few years for their SDI they have the people who know this stuff. They have the expertise and the testing facilities that we lack."

"Very well. I'll let Ambassador Madison know we'd be willing to accept a substitute for Chan," Major said after a moments thought.

Major turned and pulled a file from his desk. "I spoke with Her Highness yesterday and she expressed an intense interest in meeting with the dragons. Given our security concerns, and in light of this recent incident with the Americans, I'm going to suggest that we arrange for that meeting in a secure location, away from prying eyes.

"I will speak with Lord Kennewick about arranging for a military training session around the Balmoral estates. That should provide the privacy needed," he said. He knew he could use the Military training exercise as an excuse to move any press and the public away from the castle grounds.

"I don't think we'll have any problems setting that up on our end," Lord Mills offered. "Just tell us when."

Major nodded. He hadn't expected any difficulties with this request. "Her Highness expressed a wish to be able to meet with the current riders and the Weyrleader. She would like to be able to visit the Weyr sometime, but right now that sort of visit would attract too much attention."

"I'm sure we could arrange a visit over the summer, perhaps," Lord Mills replied. "I understand her need to meet sooner, but if she wishes to come out and see the dragons in the Weyr and there's security issues, then the summer would be best for her to visit."

"Yes," agreed Major, "that was my thought, as well."

Campbeltown Weyr, April 16th...

Albus sighed heavily and wiped at his face. He wasn't getting enough sleep of late and it was starting to show. While things were coming together here in the Weyr, elsewhere matters were rapidly spiraling out of control.

"Albus, I don't mean to offend you, but you look terrible," Harry said from the doorway.

Albus looked up and smiled, then waved him into his office. "Come in, my boy. And if I look half as bad as I feel, I must be quite a sight indeed."

Harry sat and looked over the man. He was busy teaching magic to the wizards among the riders, plus making simple enchanted bracelets that warned if someone had been obliviated, and keeping track of what was going on in the magical world for the British government. He was working too hard and sleeping too little as the heavy bags under his eyes clearly said.

"Albus, I think you should get some rest. Why not take a few days off? Give us some chapters to study and take some time off. I'm certain Hermione would make sure we did the reading," Harry said.

"Of that I have no doubt, my boy, and your idea is appealing. But before I can take any time I need to talk to James about what's happening."

"What's happening?"

"The Ministry is feuding with the Wizengamot. It's effectively paralyzed the Ministry for Magic. A number of the old noble families have holed up in their manors and started employing war wards. All in all, this effectively paralyzes the Ministry."

Harry's brows knitted in concentration. "Wouldn't that be a good thing?" he asked.

Dumbledore nodded with a slight smile. "Only if it remained that way, my boy, but these sort of confrontations rarely remain static for long. Sooner or later the Ministry will gobble up the noble houses that are rebelling and then, full of themselves from their perceived victory, they will look at what else to do with their army."

Harry scratched at his head for a moment, then nodded. It made sense to him. "So, what now?"

"We take advantage of the time this gives us to become stronger and better prepared. The Ministry will win this confrontation with the noble houses eventually. By themselves, the houses are too small to hold for long and too distrustful to seek alliances with the others," Albus replied.

"Fine, then we let them tear at each other. I would prefer that we remain out of their conflict for as long as possible."

Albus nodded. He had expected nothing less from Harry. Despite the arming of his riders, he was very reluctant to commit them to battle. "I expect the Ministry will turn to deal with the goblins once they have dealt with the Wizengamot," he offered.

Harry shook his head unhappily. "I had hoped to hear from the goblins before now. I hope they don't put it off until it's too late. Repeating the offer would seem like I'm either begging or demanding. But if I don't hear from them soon I'll have to."

"True, but give them some time. I just pray Ragnok doesn't wait until the WDF is storming their tunnels," Albus murmured.

Harry stood. "Take a day or two off. If you don't want to use Fawkes, ask a dragon to take you to Disko, where you can relax in the pools," he offered.

Albus smiled up at him. "Thank you, my boy. I'll consider it."

Harry waved and walked from the room, leaving Albus to marvel at the change in their relationship. They were more or less on an equal footing now. It was a change for the better, for both of them. And considering how the year had started off, it could have been much worse.

Harry exited the building, then he paused. "Cheki?"

"Yes, Harry?"

"Are you busy?"

"No, I'm just looking over the females. I like Comaloth, but Trath is quite nice also. On the other hand Trandieth is unusual enough.."

"Okay, okay, I get the picture," he muttered in reply. "How about we run some target practice while the wings are working their drills?"

"I'll be right there."

Harry summoned his flight jacket then he started walking toward their firing range. The new range was broken down into several parts. There was a simple range with a standard set of targets and a firing line. There was another area where they had set up straw men targets. Remus had enchanted them to not only move, but to avoid incoming damage from the dragons. There was also an observation tower which Nichols used to bellow insults and commands to people down on the ground. Harry hated to think about what the man would be like once they installed the electric loudspeaker system for him.

Chekiath landed next to Harry just as his jacket arrived. He grinned at the large dragon. "I'll do ten sets at the standing range, then we'll move to the flight area."

He clambered up onto his position and Chekiath sprang aloft. "Do you really think you'll need to fight?" asked he asked his rider.

Harry frowned. "I hope not. But if we do, I want us to know how. Not all of our riders have magic to protect their dragons."

When Chekiath landed at the firing range, Harry dismounted and slapped his dragon on the neck. "Thanks, Cheki."

He walked over to the small shed where they kept the bows and bolts and withdrew a bow and a box of normal bolts. Stepping out of the building he was surprised to hear two voices from the firing line.

"No way! They're touching!"

"Yeah, it's a hard shot to make."

Stepping into the enclosed area he was surprised to see Lee Jordan and Ronan Clark. He frowned. "What's going on here? Why aren't you with the others?"

Lee and Ronan looked up in surprise, then looked ashamed.

"Our dragons developed scale problems. Harry," Lee said. "Hagrid down checked us for flight for the next two days, so we figured we get in some target practice while everyone else was running flight drills."

Harry nodded. "Your dragons are okay?"

"Oh, sure! Hagrid says we caught it early and they should be fine," Ronan said, reassuring Harry. "You're here for target practice also?" he asked, grinning.

Harry looked down at the bow and box of bolts in his hand and nodded.

"Great! You need to check this out. Lee can shoot well enough to place his bolts right next to each other!" Ronan exclaimed.

Harry looked interested. "Oh?"

He moved a little closer after placing his bow and bolts at an empty station. With people manning the firing range, he knew Sergeant Nichols was up in the observation tower, watching them like a hawk and just itching for a reason to chew them out.

"Go ahead, Lee, let's see," Harry said.

"Do it again," urged Ronan.

Harry grinned and watched his friend insert a bolt into the bow, then he cocked it. Outside the range, Chekiath rumbled happily to himself. His rider was indulging in a different form of relaxation, but it was still good for him.

#10 Downing Street, London, April 20th ...

"Prime Minister, Lord Kennewick is here for his morning appointment."

Prime Minister Major looked over at his intercom and pressed a button on it. "Send him in, then hold all calls."

"Yes sir," came the reply.

Major smiled and waved when the door opened. "Cyril, how are you?"

Cyril Lord Kennewick smiled and sat down. "Well enough, John. I wanted to drop by to explain some new developments that you need to be aware of."

Major nodded and pulled out a file from his secure drawer. He opened the file and glanced down briefly at it. "I take it this is in relation to your memo of 14th April?"

Cyril nodded. "Partly. We've also developed some new intelligence, which is really out of my area of expertise."

"Oh?"

"Through the contacts via the Weyr, Albus Dumbledore put us in touch with one Alejandro Croaker, former Head of the Department of Mysteries for the Ministry of Magic. Like our own special departments, this one in particular had two primary duties. One was for research into what they called 'dangerous magics' and a second, lesser known remit of controlling the Ministry through selective assassination."

Major's eyebrows rose to nearly brush his hairline and he motioned for Kennewick to continue.

"Yes, well, in recent years, Croaker was unable to fulfill that particular aspect of his remit, thanks largely to severe compartmentalization and funding cuts. Only his active agents knew of their secondary function. Because of that, they had no advocates among the rest of the Ministry or in their parliament, this Wizengamot thing of theirs.

"Croaker was recently forced to flee in fear for his life. Thanks to Albus Dumbledore, he fell into our laps. This chap is even more of an intelligence trove than Dumbledore. He is most unhappy that we know as much as we do about his society, but he understands the how and why of it. What bothers him now is that he is of the opinion that we'll need to perform a complete turnover of the Wizard Ministry and its parliament."

Kennewick paused and looked up from his notes. "John, I want to be clear here. Croaker is firmly convinced that we have to replace the entire Ministry, and he has been trying to convince my people to do it without alerting the rest of our society. He makes for a rather convincing case that exposing the magical world to the general public might lead to problems we're not ready or capable of dealing with."

Major frowned. It was an issue he had considered and he still wasn't sure how to go about keeping that secret.

"What would you suggest, Cyril?" he asked.

"We have several cover stories made up, given the amount of exposure that we have to deal with. Hopefully we won't have to worry about it but it is a very real concern and only one of many. John, the real question that begs to be asked is what happens after we clean them out? We're suddenly going to be dealing with fifty to sixty thousand British wizards who don't have a clue about our society, let alone our laws. My people can enforce laws, but we're not equipped to install a government for these people. That, my friend, is your job."

Kennewick looked at Major, who nodded.

The Prime Minister knew he was right. The Ministry of Defense was not the Ministry needed to reestablish Her Majesty's control over the Magicals. No, that would require his office and the Home office.

"Sir, it's also been suggested that perhaps we could use the dragons as a cover story to help keep the wizarding world secret," Kennewick added.

Major blinked in surprise. It was an idea he hadn't considered. "Cyril, you are aware that we have been trying to quietly bring the dragons recognition as an indigenous people?"

"Yes sir, and I understand you'll need to confer with the Weyrleader on this matter. I brought it up so that you could consider it. Exposing the dragons would certainly generate a massive amount of media attention. That would be useful if we need to downplay any military operations to take over the Ministry," replied Kennewick.

Major nodded. "I will speak with the Weyrleader personally about this, but warn your planners that this is an idea that will not be allowed without approval from my office."

Cyril nodded. "Thank you, John. I'll let the boys know."

Major smiled thinly. "Very well, anything else?"

"Yes, the latest report from the Yanks is more upbeat than we expected. Apparently, the current Minister over there was the leader of an effort to control the federal government. Once they arrested him, the rest of his people folded quickly. The average American wizard is appalled at what they tried to do and are openly calling for him to be hanged.

"We expect that within a few weeks we'll start seeing our boys come home. It seems as though the pure blood issue never generated a lot of unhappy wizards over there, but their population was so big compared to ours that it wasn't uncommon for wizards to work in the normal world. The Department of Magic is firmly in federal control now and they have an executive mandate to overturn all of the blood supremacy laws that were passed.

"We're scheduled to receive an inter-agency working group from them next month. The whole idea is to try to determine which other normal governments are in danger from the wizards, and see how we can help them."

"Very well, but work with the Foreign office so that we have complete coverage. This isn't just a military mission, Cyril. Some of our Allies might be controlled. There's also the chance that we can build some good will with those nations neutral with us," Major said.

Cyril nodded unhappily, but he recognized they couldn't exactly invade these countries. They were barely able to help the Yanks and would be hard pressed to offer similar help to multiple countries at the same time. "Yes sir, I'll see to it," he replied.

Hangar #2, Campbeltown Weyr, April 25th...

Harry stood on the stage with a large pile of boxes behind him. Next to him stood Emma Granger and her husband, Dan.

He watched the large doors open and the dragons filed in with their riders. He grinned and stepped forward to the edge of the stage.

"Good morning everyone," he called. He had missed breakfast so this was the first he was seeing anyone today.

A choruses of 'mornings' were returned while he waited for them to take their seats. He waited a minute longer, then he grinned. "Over the last few days our rider training has slacked off somewhat. Your dragons are fully rated for flight, and it's expected that you'll continue with your wing exercises each day."

He paused and stuck his hands in his pockets and looked at them expectantly. "In other words, you're trained to ride and care for your dragon. Now, Mrs. Granger made me aware that most of you non-magical riders have been using her computer, or one of the other office machines, to work on your homework. We're going to address that today along with a bunch of other things."

A buzz filled the room as the riders noted the large number of boxes behind Emma, each contained a logo of a very popular computer company.

"Before we get to handing out the new computers, I want to explain a few other changes I'm making. Currently we have thirty four dragons and riders. Not counting Hagrid, who will be busy with Weyrling master duties, that leaves thirty three dragons to split into three wings of eleven people each.

"Each wing will be led by the Wing Leader. Wing Leaders will have a second in command called a Wing Second. Yes, these are terms taken right out of Pern history, but I think they still apply. I will lead Wing One and Ronan will be my Wing Second. Wing Leaders, after this meeting come up here and I'll give you the list of the riders in your wing."

Harry paused and waited while Dan walked over to the surprised Ronan and handed him a small box containing a pin of a single gold star.

Ronan looked at the star, then up at Harry. Everyone then noted he wore two stars on his collar. Struggling with the star, Ronan tried to put it into his collar and fight his blush at the same time. Finally, Karen Khan stepped over and batted his hands away, then she pinned the star to his collar.

"Wing Seconds are in charge of the Wing when the Leader isn't around. Now, before the rest of you complain about these folks being able to order you around, they have other duties. Each Wing is responsible for providing riders for daily inspections at the infirmary. They are also responsible for providing people to help support the herds, plus arrange for weekly training sessions. Flight exercises will be conducted weekly, at least until we're comfortable with the idea of training."

He waited until he saw comprehension in their eyes. This wasn't about privilege. It was about people willing to step forward and take responsibility.

"Wing two, your leader is Martin Benson. Marty, your second is Hermione Granger."

Marty looked at Harry doubtfully and Harry caught the look. "Marty, I'm confident you can do this," he said. "You worked really hard to solve your jump imagery problem and I know you've been helping every chance you can with the herds."

The group laughed. Marty, like May, came from a farming community and he enjoyed working with the animals. Lately he had been pressing Harry to add pigs to the list of animals they maintained. He was hoping that at some point the herds would be capable of feeding their dragons and the Weyr proper.

Marty nodded with a shy grin. "I'll do my best, Harry."

"I know you will, Marty," Harry replied, then he waited while Dan pinned the star on Hermione's collar. Several chuckled when Dan kissed his daughter's cheek.

"Wing Three presented a bit of a problem for me, but from my own observations and from what I learned from Hagrid, I've decided to turn the tasks over to Draco Malfoy, with Michelle Smith as his Second."

Harry turned a hard eye on the pair and Draco swallowed nervously.

"I want to be perfectly clear to you both. If I discover that you've allowed your relationship to interfere with your duties, I'll demote you both and put you to painting the fence around the camp. Am I clear?" Harry said.

Both nodded fervently and Harry motioned to Dan to hand them their insignia.

"Very well. Wing leaders, you have two days to provide May with schedules of your people helping in the infirmary and with the food herds. See May to find out what she needs, then plan accordingly. Luna, pick out seven people and start putting together a plan for us to find at least forty candidates for the next hatching in November. Ideally, I'd like to see at least half be magical but I won't hold that against you if you can't find them."

Luna looked up and smiled dreamily. "So what will you hold against me and will I enjoy it?" she asked in a sultry tone.

Harry stopped and blushed while the others laughed at his discomfort. Luna was constantly tossing comments like that out to see what kind of reaction she'd get.

"Um, not today, Luna," he stammered, then he glanced at Hermione, who smirked at him. She was accustomed to Luna and her ways and even sometimes found her wicked sense of humor amusing.

Shaking his head, he turned back to the others and gestured towards Emma. "Mrs. Granger has a computer for each of you. The magical students are getting a model that's been specially shielded for military use. I don't understand all of the details but we hope the shielding will prevent the machines from burning out.

"Sometime in the next week, someone from the British Army will be here to connect all the machines together into something called a network. Wizards and witches, if you are visiting a non-magical rider's quarters, you are asked to refrain from using magic anywhere within ten feet of the machine.

"Finally, starting tomorrow, we will attend a one hour class every morning after breakfast on how to use the machine and some of the programs."

Ronan held up his hand.

Harry nodded to Emma and she walked over to stand next to him. "Yes, Ronan," she said.

"What kind of programs will be learning to use?"

Emma smiled broadly. "I know from your school records that a great many of you have used computers before and some of you were actually programming them. That is a little out of our depth here. What I hope to accomplish is to give everyone an understanding of the word processor and the spreadsheet software. Both programs will help a lot with your homework, as well as some parts of Weyr operations. Finally, Harry has told Lord Mills to authorize software purchases if you have suggestions other than games."

Emma smirked at the good natured grumbling that came from most of the non-magical boys. Harry placed a hand on Emma's shoulder and she turned to look at him. "I think you should tell them everything."

She grinned back at him and turned back to the riders. "When Harry appointed May as a trainee Weyrhealer, he also told her that she

would be sent to school to help with that. We've been talking about that and how it wasn't fair to the others. Lord Mills has given us projections of our financial status over the next five years and we've determined that, even with new riders being added every year, we can afford to provide university schooling for anyone who wants it. especially if you're looking for training in things we can use in the Weyr."

An excited buzz ran through the riders as they realized they were being offered scholarships.

Harry chuckled and walked over to sit on a stool. "There's a lot to do still," he said when they settled down. "But things are really looking up. In the meantime, the Wings will do their weekly training and the rest of the time we'll dedicate to schooling until we no longer need it."

Campbeltown Weyr Social Hall, later that evening...

May walked into the hall and looked around. As usual the hall was broken down into three distinct sections. The guys on one side of the hall, the girls on the other and the people exploring the possibility of being a couple in the center.

Draco and Michelle sat close enough to be touching knees. She was busy explaining something about the new computers and he was scribbling notes in a book and nodding while he listened to her.

Ronan Clark and Karen Khan sat near each other, but both were engrossed in their studies.

She spotted her prey and zeroed in on her.

Hermione started when May plopped down the heavy book in front of her and flipped it open to a specific page. She pointed at the page. "Can you make this?"

Hermione stared at her for a moment, then she looked down at the page. It was a recipe for a potion that would cure arthritis.

"May," Hermione said slowly, "even if I can make this, I can't promise it would work on a normal person."

"It will, Hermione," Luna said softly from her corner. "The magic is in the potion, not in the person drinking it. One of the reasons why we hid from the normals was because we couldn't keep up with the demand for potions and cures, not to mention the jealousy."

"Jealousy?" asked Mariah.

Luna shrugged. "I can do magic. Doesn't it bother you that I can do it and you can't?"

Mariah shrugged. "No, not really. Susan was nice enough to help with my monthly cramps. That means I don't have to buy medication, but other than that, I don't really see much of a difference between us. I'm Buth's rider, what more do I need? I mean, Mr. Dark and Dreamy may be taken, but there are still some very nice fish out there."

"May be?" asked Hermione tightly.

"May be," Luna replied for Mariah. "Hermione, a lot of things can happen that none of us can foresee. You're only fifteen and Harry's fourteen. Thinking that your relationship with Harry is permanent at this point would be silly."

"It could be," Hermione protested.

"Yes, it could be," Luna agreed. "But not without a lot of work on both of your parts. Tell me, Hermione, where is Harry tonight?"

She frowned. "Well, he said he was tired and wanted to turn in early."

Luna nodded. "Yes, around seven pm then?"

Hermione nodded, then frowned. "What is your point, Luna?" she demanded. She had been annoyed with Harry for skiving off their study time.

"Harry went off to his quarters early tonight because Momnarth rose to be covered by Norendrath around seven, Hermione. Watch him next time an unbonded pair rise. His hands tremble slightly and he seems distracted. Momnarth and Norendrath both affect him more than, say, Narth. Mostly because he's closer to Momnarth and

Norendrath than he is to Narth. I have been trying to warn you and everyone else that what we see Harry going through is only a small part of what he'll experience when his own dragon rises, or when ours do."

"So, what are you saying, Luna? That I should go shag Harry?" Hermione said angrily.

Luna reached for her cup and took a sip, then she shook her head. "No, what I'm saying is that you've stuck your head in the sands and ignored the signs altogether. You were short with Harry tonight when he said he wasn't in the mood to study and wanted to go to bed. He was obviously uncomfortable and very embarrassed, but you never noticed that. All you wanted was him to be here studying."

Several girls nodded in agreement.

Hermione looked down at the table, refusing to meet their gazes. She had noticed that Harry was affected by the dragons, but had decided that she would not let the dragons interfere with the relationship she was building with him. It took Luna to point out that despite her desire to ignore the dragons, it might be impossible to do.

"Hermione," Susan said softly, "what will you do if someday soon Harry asks you for your help?"

Hermione frowned. "I'm not sure," she admitted, "But I can't see Harry asking anytime soon either." She stood suddenly, gathered up her books and walked away, clearly troubled by the conversation.

"She needs to get her head together," Mariah said sadly, "or one of us will take Harry away from her."

While the other girls nodded, May looked thoughtful. She stared down at the book she had placed in front of Hermione with an unhappy expression.

"May?"

She looked up to see Susan looking at her. "Yes?"

"Ask Remus to obtain the ingredients for your potion. If Hermione won't brew it, there are several of us in the weyr who can," Susan offered with a smile.

May smiled back and stood. "All right, I'll talk to Remus." She walked over to where Sirius, Remus and Captain Atkins sat.

Luna sighed at the retreating girl and shook her head.

"What's wrong, Luna?" asked Susan.

"Those two, May and Hermione. It's obvious that both of them want Harry very much. May backed off while Hermione tried with Harry, but unless Hermione breaks some of her habits, she's not going to be able to hold onto him. I find it sad really. My family was raised in the old ways, even though we have been light magic users for centuries. Sex was common in some of the rituals. And while I was too young to be a part of them, nothing was hidden from me.

"I think the dragons are right. We're placing too much importance on the issue of sex. We worry about it until it starts to affect our daily lives."

Mariah shrugged. "It's not like any of us can do anything about it. Harry and Hermione will work it out or they won't," she said, then she turned and motioned towards Karen Khan and Ronan Clark. "Those two are getting chummy."

Susan chuckled, then she nudged Mariah, "Don't think I didn't notice you offering to tutor Lee Jordan in math and history."

Mariah sighed. "Another Mr. Dark and Dreamy. Unlike Harry, Lee is funny."

Luna and Susan nodded. Lee did have a wicked sense of humor.

Mariah leaned back in her seat. "I think I'll go see if Lee needs any help," she murmured, then she smiled wickedly at the other two girls before packing up her books and standing up.

Harry's Quarters, Campbeltown Weyr...

Harry looked up from his book when he heard the knock at his door. "It's open!" he called, then he marked his place in the book and closed it.

Hermione entered and looked a little surprised to see Harry working at his desk. She moved to sit across from him. "Can we talk?"

He smiled at her and nodded. "Dobby brought a pot of fresh tea about a half hour ago. Would you like some?"

She shook her head. "No, thank you."

He peered at her from across his desk. "So, what did you want to talk about?"

She looked down at her hands in her lap. "I wanted to apologize to you. I was short with you tonight when you said you didn't feel like studying. I didn't see what you were going through."

He leaned forward with a frown. "Going through?"

She looked up at him. "Harry, we all know that dragon matings have an effect on you."

He flushed and averted his gaze, unable to look her in the eye. "Oh," he replied weakly.

"We've been talking about it, and as much as I hate to suggest it, I think you need to speak with Luna. She has a theory about what will happen when our dragons rise to mate."

Harry shrugged. "It's not too bad most of the time. I can meditate through a mating flight. They rarely last long," he replied, sounding very uncomfortable.

"Well, I just wanted to say I was sorry, Harry. I was rude to you when I had no right to be. I don't want this sort of thing to become an issue between us," she replied.

He nodded. "I wasn't angry or upset. I spent less than an hour meditating and then started studying."

She stood and smiled. "Good. Well, I'll see you tomorrow."

"Good night," he replied and watched her leave his quarters. Their conversation had been supremely awkward and unsatisfying to both of them.

"She means well, Harry," Chekiath said from his bed. He watched his rider with his eyes twirling slightly.

Harry nodded. "I know, it just makes me feel uncomfortable."

"You won't always be affected by the other dragons, but you can talk to all of us. As you grow, you'll become accustomed to it," Chekiath offered. "I am sure of it."

"I hope so, Cheki. I have enough problems with those particular urges without dragons adding to it."

Chekiath rumbled in amusement and Harry grinned at him. Their bond was so complete that there was no hiding anything from each other. Harry knew intimately that Chekiath wanted to cover Comaloth and Trath both, at a minimum. And likewise, Cheki was aware of Harry's own desires concerning the riders of those dragons.

The fact that Harry couldn't seem to figure out which one he liked best puzzled him and filled him with a deep fear that someday soon he'd end up hurting one of them.

Campbeltown Weyr, May 1st...

Harry stepped out of the administrative building and smiled. Arrayed in front of him was the entire complement of the Weyr - five hundred thirty four dragons. The three manned wings were in front, with Hagrid attaching himself to Wing Three for the trip. Behind them were the twenty five non-bonded wings, consisting of twenty dragons each.

He looked over his riders and nodded in satisfaction. Each rider was wearing their best flight suit and each dragon had been oiled and brushed until they gleamed in the sunlight.

Next to the three manned Wings was a much smaller group containing Spath, Momnarth, Norendrath and a few other dragons carrying the non-riders of the Weyr. The Queen had asked to meet

with the dragons and Harry had decided that the invitation extended to the entire Weyr, including the non-riders.

Harry smiled reassuringly at Narcissa, who was very nervous about this trip. He wasn't sure if it was because it was a trip to meet the Queen or because it was a trip on dragonback.

Climbing up onto Chekiath, he pumped his fist twice and the Weyr sprang skywards and vanished.

Balmoral Castle, May 1st...

Sir Robert stood nervously with the Queen on the lawn of the castle. Nearby stood Prime Minister Major and Lord Mills, who were conversing quietly.

Sir Robert glanced at his watch, then he looked up hearing the Queen hitch her breath. The first wing of twenty dragons appeared, then more wings of the Weyr arrived from Between. It was a silent aerial display as the bonded wings made a low level pass, then turned and peeled off, with each dragon landing such that they formed a line. Once they were down, each rider dismounted and stood with their dragon just over their right shoulder.

The non-riders landed nearby and scrambled down to gather in a cluster. The last to land was Harry, he had moved out of formation to come down closer to Sir Robert and the Queen. As he landed, Spath and Momnarth moved up to flank Chekiath.

Harry dropped lightly to the ground next to Chekiath, then he pulled off his gloves and headgear, stowing them in a small bottomless bag on his belt. He waited as the final wings came to a landing on the large lawn.

Once the Weyr had landed, Harry over walked to Sir Robert.

Sir Robert stepped closer and smiled at him. The view of so many dragons over head had been awe inspiring.

Chekiath took another step forward so that his large head was just over Harry's shoulder and the Queen watched the large dragon with intense interest.

"Your Majesty, may I introduce you to Weyrleader Harry Potter, rider of Chekiath, his bonded dragon," Sir Robert said softly.

"Greetings, Lady Holder," Chekiath said. "My rider and I are very happy to meet with you. On behalf of our Weyr, we would like to thank you for all the help your hold has provided us."

The Queen blinked. She had been briefed on dragons and how they communicated, but it still came as a shock to her to experience it for the first time.

"My goodness," she murmured, then she smiled at the large creature. Chekiath was an imposing sight. His size alone would give anyone pause. Folklore usually portrayed dragons as fierce, vicious beasts, but none touched on their beauty. Chekiath's scales glinted a metallic bronze in the morning sunlight and his eyes whirled slowly, glowing a bright blue.

Unknown to her, she stood before the largest dragon on Earth with a eighty four foot wing span. All of the bonded dragons were growing at phenomenal rates. Soon, the riders would dominate the Weyr, having the largest and strongest dragons.

Harry stood next to his dragon and silently thanked every God out there that his dragon didn't decide to call her something silly.

"Thank you, Chekiath. It is our sincere hope that you will find welcome in our country for many years to come," she said to the dragon, then she turned and looked at Harry.

"Weyrleader. It is a most unusual title for a lad from Surrey," she murmured with a slight frown. "We have read the reports and met with our experts concerning the abilities of your dragons and of their plight. We were appalled and shamed to discover our own wizards could be so cruel to such a noble race. You are to be commended, Weyrleader, not just for saving the dragons, but for showing a compassion that astounds us, considering your background."

Harry paled and he looked unhappily at the Queen. She eyed him intently, as if reading his thoughts.

"We have had our people investigate your background, Weyrleader, and we find ourselves confused and very unsettled by what we have

learned. According to what we've been able to discover, you attended a school for criminal boys that doesn't exist. Neighbors and schoolmates describe you to be quite the criminal and yet not one can cite a single incident they personally witnessed. On the other hand, your cousin appears to be quite the hooligan."

Harry blanched and looked down, while the Queen eyed him carefully.

Chekiath growled and steam wafted from his nostrils. "My rider is not a criminal. Those people, they..."

"Cheki, please," Harry said tightly, pleading with his dragon. The pair stared at each other for a moment before Chekiath snorted in annoyance.

"I don't like it," he said unhappily. "They did terrible things to you, Harry, and made up lies to hurt you!"

"I know Cheki, but now is not the time for this."

Harry turned his attention back to the Queen and took a shaky breath, "Ma'am, I apologize."

He trailed off when she shook her head. "On the contrary, Weyrleader, it became very clear early on in our investigation that you had slipped through the cracks in a system designed to protect children like yourself. If anyone should apologize, it should be our child social services.

"And now, here you are, leader of a nation of majestic beings, as intelligent and loving as any human. We could hear the love and protectiveness in your dragon's defense of your character and we find it very refreshing.

"Sir Robert has been most eloquent in describing the abilities of your dragons and we were most impressed with your flying when you arrived. But even more impressive is the closeness of your bond with your dragon."

Embarrassed, Harry's eyes glanced around trying to think of a way of changing the topic. "Your Majesty, if it please you, I would like to

introduce Spath, the oldest living dragon on the planet. Spath has personal memories spanning back hundreds of years."

"Hundreds?" exclaimed the Queen.

"I am the elder," Spath said with dignity. "I have lived many lives of dragons and I remember those times. The other dragons had forgotten even that. For them, it was the time of the beasts, where we knew no man and did not even know ourselves. I have lived many turns and my greatest wish has been fulfilled. I have witnessed the renewal of our time honored bond. When my time comes, I will go Between in peace."

"And I hope that isn't for many turns to come, my friend," Harry replied gently, then he turned back to the Queen. "Every Weyr has an elder dragon who, for some reason, has lived far beyond their normal life span. We think it might have been a way of preserving memories, in case they were able to renew their bond with the human race, but we're just not sure, Ma'am. There is so much we don't know and so much still to learn. What we do know is that Spath is close to three hundred years old.

"The dragons have a rich history that staggers the imagination," offered Sir Robert. "They literally remember times when man was still cowering in caves and the neanderthal outnumbered homosapiens. And amazingly, they can share those memories with us. One of the riders has been recording memories of life in Britain in the tenth century."

"If I may, ma'am, I would be honored to introduce you to some of our dragons and their riders," Harry offered.

The Queen nodded and Harry led her, Sir Robert and the rest of her party over to where Wing Three was assembled. He approached Hagrid, who had, after some intense convincing, trimmed his beard into something manageable. Personally, Harry thought Hagrid looked very good with his hair neatly brushed and his beard trimmed.

"Ma'am, when the issue of meeting with you arose several months ago, our Weyrling Master took it upon himself to create something totally unique to mark the occasion," Harry said, then he motioned to Hagrid.

Hagrid shuffled forward and quickly pulled off his cap. If the queen was surprised by his height she didn't show it.

"Rubeus Hagrid, Ma'am," Sir Robert said. "He is a wizard, the current Weyrling Master, as well as the healer for the dragons."

The term wizard fully applied to Hagrid since he now used a wand he had fashioned from a dragon scale. He had asked Harry about making a wand. Harry had shrugged and told him he wasn't going to stop him from replacing his umbrella wand.

The Queen turned to Sir Robert. "Weyrling Master?"

"Hagrid is in charge of seeing that the hatching grounds are ready for clutching dragons and that when it's time for impressing, the Hatching Weyr is ready to receive candidates. After the hatching, he oversees the training of the riders and newly hatched dragons, ensuring that each bonded pair learns the tasks needed to safeguard their bonded. This includes basic healing, flight training, training on going Between and so on," Sir Robert replied.

The Queen nodded and turned back to Hagrid.

"Beggin' yer pardon, ma'am," Hagrid said haltingly, "but when we heard about meetin' with yeh I created this to give yeh. My Da used to love talkin' about yeh. He was muggle born, yeh see."

Hagrid held out an opalescent scale, roughly thirty centimeters in diameter. On one side was an intricate carving of a dragon in flight. On the back was a carving of the seal of the House of Windsor.

"It's a dragon scale from an Antipodean Opaleye, ma'am. They take the longest to mature, so their final scale droppings are very large, like this one. The dragon gave me this scale as thanks fer healin' him from a very bad infection. We'd like yeh to have this, in honor o' the occasion."

She took the scale in both hands and was surprised at how heavy it was for its size. She examined the large scale carefully. She was no stranger to master works of art, and this plate sized carving was exquisite in detail. The dragon carving was so detailed she could make out individual scales, and the royal seal looked as good as

anything made by Cartier. The scale seemed to shine with a light of its own, even in the bright sunshine, which only added to its beauty.

"You have a true gift, Master Hagrid. We thank you, both for the gift and for your efforts in caring for our new friends."

Hagrid beamed and Harry pat him on the arm.

Harry was so proud of his friend. The large man was really a very gentle soul, but so few bothered to see beyond his size and rough speech.

Harry spent the next thirty minutes introducing the Queen to the riders and the dragons. She often stopped to speak with the dragons. Later, Harry wouldn't remember much of what happened, but two encounters did stand out with crystal clarity. When she was introduced to Sirius Black and Albus Dumbledore.

"Ma'am, this is Sirius Black, my godfather." Harry stopped and looked at the Queen with worry. She was scowling at the older man.

"Yes, my people had much to tell us about Sirius Black. Lord Black, we are displeased with you. Did you really think revenge was more important than your obligation to your young ward? By your actions, you condemned yourself and your ward to a decade of horrors."

Sirius paled and a thin line of sweat broke out on his brow. "Your Majesty, not a day went by in that prison where I didn't curse my impulsive nature. And a day still doesn't pass where I don't mourn what I could have had. My only defense is that I wasn't thinking right. I had lost a man I considered a brother and a woman I loved like a sister. Both were betrayed by a man I also considered a brother.

"I don't care about what happened to myself, but I have a good idea of what happened to my ward and it still gives me nightmares."

Harry moved to say something, but the Queen shot him a quelling glare before turning back to Sirius. "Good," she said. "Perhaps some good has come from this after all. We know of the vows you took when you accepted the role of godparent and know of the penalties they would enact should you shirk your duties again. See that you do not."

Sirius nodded fervently.

The Queen stared at him for a moment longer, then she turned to the Prime Minister and her entourage. "We are displeased with the fact that Lord Black is still considered a wanted criminal by both our magical and mundane governments. We know the magical government is in rebellion, but the mundane government will put aside the illegal warrant for Lord Black. We will see that a writ is provided to your office tomorrow, Mister Prime Minister, ordering such. We shall also provide writs for various others wanted by the Ministry of Magic.

"My magical Minister has issued a number of illegal warrants we intend to see voided," the Queen declared firmly.

John Major blinked in shock, then bowed his head in acknowledgment. "Yes, ma'am," he replied. He knew Sirius had a death warrant out on him, and both Harry and Dumbledore were wanted. Voiding those warrants could tip their hand earlier than he had hoped.

Nodding, she then turned back to Sirius and moved closer. "Be a good parent, to the Weyrleader and the rest of them, my Lord Black. They are so very young, each and every one of them," she said quietly so that only he could hear. "Care for him and his riders and you will earn the healing you deserve."

"Yes, ma'am," he replied earnestly. It was impossible to miss the emotion choking his voice.

She stepped back and eyed him for a moment then nodded and walked over to where Sir Robert and the Prime Minister were quietly conversing.

Harry stepped up to Sirius and gripped his arm. "Are you all right?" he said. The dragons had heard what the Queen had said and Cheki had told Harry, but he wasn't about to embarrass Sirius here. Later perhaps, but not here.

Sirius nodded and gave him a weak smile. "She's tougher than McGonagall," he murmured.

The final encounter with Albus Dumbledore was slightly more cordial than the one with Sirius Black, but only slightly.

"Albus Dumbledore, ma'am, former Headmaster of Hogwarts and Chief Warlock of the Wizengamot," Harry said.

"Mr. Dumbledore, it is my understanding that you are very familiar with the conditions that brought us to the current conflict we find ourselves in, and furthermore we understand that you have been trying your best to help our government. You have our thanks for your efforts, but we would like to speak with you in more detail at some later date. Sir Robert will inform you when you are to come before us," the Queen said.

Albus Dumbledore, undoubtedly one of the most powerful wizards in the world, was unused to being ordered anywhere, so this was a totally new situation to him. "Yes, ma'am," he stammered in surprise.

She eyed him for a moment longer, then she turned and motioned for Harry to approach. "Come, Weyrleader. I realize that a state dinner is not really appropriate for your dragons, and our chefs lament being unable to show off their prowess. However, we have arranged a tea for you and your riders in the back garden."

"Then, with your permission, ma'am, I'll inform the non-bonded wings that they may retire to the Weyr. We thought this might be a problem, so we took the liberty of arranging for a harvest of fresh albacore to be delivered to the Weyr. The dragons consider the fish a delicacy," Harry replied with a smile.

The Queen smiled and nodded, giving her permission. Harry turned and glanced at the Wings and they sprang aloft, leaving only the bonded dragons behind. Those dragons went airborne as the others returned to the weyr and ended up landing on various parts of the castle.

Harry started to turn to rejoin the Queen when Spath stopped him.

"Weyrleader, the Lady Holder is very important to her hold and to us?"

Harry paused and turned to the ancient dragon. "Yes, Spath, she is. I know you find the concept strange, but the Monarchy of Great

Britain represents the national soul of the country. Even Wizards respect the Monarchy."

"She is inadequately protected then, Weyrleader. I know of the humans and wizards who guard her, but she should have more protection."

Prime Minister Major and Sir Robert came up to Harry, looking perplexed. Spath had been broadcasting such that everyone could hear him.

Harry nodded. "Yes, I thought of that as well, Spath, but I cannot assign dragons to watch her without her permission. As Lady Holder, it is her decision to make, but I will ask her."

"It is the honorable thing for the Weyr to do, Weyrleader," Spath replied.

"I agree, my friend," Harry replied, then he glanced over at Sir Robert.

"Harry?" asked Sir Robert.

He sighed and turned to face the man. "Spath and I both noted that, while the queen has a powerful guard force, it's designed to stop a mundane attack. A couple wizards on brooms could still penetrate the castle grounds. A wizarding attack by the WDF would be a disaster. They'd never be able to hold them off. Spath thinks we should post some non-bonded dragons as additional security and I agree with him."

"They would do that?" exclaimed John Major.

Harry reached out with one hand, laying it against his dragon. "The Weyrs will protect all who ask for protection, sir. On Pern, they were a form of justice that any could appeal to. I won't say that is their role anymore, but here we will help our friends," he said with authority. "You, sir, and your nation, have bent over backwards to help us. As I offered my people to help with your conflict with the wizards, I also offer this help. A single dragon could snatch the Queen from danger and take her to safety anywhere in the world. A wing of ten could fight off a determined assault of hundreds of wizards."

The dragons remaining thrummed in approval.

He was shocked when the Queen stepped forward and looped her arm through his. "Come, Weyrleader. We are certain the Prime Minister will consider your most generous offer. We admit to being intrigued by it and your dragons. Would they talk to us, as well?"

"If you wish, ma'am, I can introduce you to a dragon whose ancestors have lived freely here for more than a thousand years. North can share with you memories of life in Britain from the time of William the Conqueror all the way up to your father, King George. While the dragons didn't pay a lot of attention to what we humans were doing, they do remember a lot of what they saw and can share those memories with us."

She glanced over at Major, who managed to look somewhat embarrassed, but he nodded. The details still needed to be worked out, but the Queen would be getting a dragon guard detail.

Campbeltown Weyr, May 1st...

Harry peeled off his jacket and tossed it onto his chair, then he sat heavily on the edge of his bed and sighed tiredly. He never even noted when Dobby appeared and picked up his jacket and put it away. The meeting with the Queen had been a smashing success, but he had been on edge the entire time. He knew at any moment a dragon could say something that might give offense. That hadn't happened and he was supremely proud of his riders and dragons, but the day had been emotionally exhausting.

When they returned to the Weyr, each dragon went to get their treat of a large fish, thanks to Hagrid and Selanth, who had been catching and storing them in a netted cove at Disko.

A lot had been accomplished during their meeting. The dragons had a new friend who came away impressed by their abilities. He had asked North to come back to the castle to share a memory he had of King George, the Queen's father. North had been one of the few free ranging dragons in the UK that the wizards were constantly hunting, so he had memories of much of what he had overflown.

It had been hard to place the exact location of the memory, but the Queen recognized her father and her mother walking and talking in a garden setting. They were not yet married at that point and still courting. It was an aspect of her parents that she never considered before and she couldn't hide the tears the memory brought.

Harry decided that Narth would make an ideal dragon to be either in charge of or be part of the detail to protect the Queen.

He looked up when a knock came from the door. "It's open," he called.

Sirius walked in and grabbed a chair not far away. "I'm beat," he exclaimed, causing Harry to chuckle. He sat heavily and grinned at his godson.

"Me too," he replied. "I kept expecting one of the dragons to call her old bat or something."

Sirius laughed loudly in that strange barking laugh of his. When he finally calmed down he turned to Harry. "I want you to know that your parents would have been so proud of you today. Well, your dad would have been. Your mum would be mortified when you presented yourself to the Queen as if you weren't her subject. But I think, given the circumstances, she would have understood.

"The dragons upheld their end, and your riders seemed to glow under her praise. But your approval meant more to them than the Queen's praise. That was your doing out there today, your dragons and your riders."

"I know," Harry replied softly. "I was so very proud of them, even that git, Chapman."

Chapman was an irritant, but nothing more than that. He skirted the edge and pushed the limits every so often, but never enough to make Harry as angry as the time he had gotten himself photographed.

"Look, Harry, I'll talk to James about setting up a security detail for the Queen," Sirius offered.

Harry nodded gratefully. "Thanks, I was hoping you would. We both know the Prime Minister's office will be asking about that in a day or two."

Sirius nodded, then looked down at his hands. "Harry, about that writ from the Queen," he said quietly. "As much as I want to be able to walk freely down the street, if the Queen's writ falls into the Ministry of Magic's hands, it may push them over the edge."

Harry leaned back on the bed and frowned. "Yes, that occurred to me as well, but I am tired of being unable to walk about freely in a place like Diagon Alley. You aren't the only one who has a price on his head."

Sirius stood and patted him on the shoulder. "Let's leave the worries to the Prime Minister. I'm sure he's aware of the problems and he'll think of something."

Harry nodded. "Good idea."

Sirius bid him a good night, then left the room.

Harry sat quietly for a moment, then heard the wall to Cheki's stall opening so he could enter.

"Good fish?" he sent.

"Very tasty. They saved one of the bigger ones for me." Chekiath replied happily.

Harry nodded and looked at the door that separated them. "Maybe I should close the door? Just in case." he muttered.

"I heard that," Chekiath replied. "I don't know what you're worried about. If I fart, I fart. They don't seem to bother me."

"Chekiath, you also breath fire! Of course a fart isn't going to bother you," Harry countered in a pained tone.

Chekiath rumbled with laughter. "Well, just consider that those fish tend to give all of us gas. At least you have a door to use. Most of the riders haven't installed a door yet."

The thought of the wings mustering out for breakfast coughing and choking brought a smile to his face. He reached over and flipped the blankets over him. "G'night, Cheki," he murmured, forgetting to close the door.

Cheki turned several times in his bed, then settled facing the open door. He could see Harry on his bed and that was good enough for him. He understood that Harry wanted privacy every so often, which was why the door had been installed, but he rarely closed it.

The Weyrleader would join his riders in the morning when their dragons woke them with fish farts.

Campbeltown Weyr Kitchen Hall, May 2nd...

Remus paused at the entrance of the hall and looked around. It was still early and only a few people were present. Dan and Emma sat at a table, each engrossed in the morning paper. It was strange how they had managed to find niches for themselves among the riders, but both had found positions which made them essential to the Weyr.

Dan helped introduce the wizards to mundane technology, as well as being the Weyr's dentist to both human and dragon alike. Emma slipped into the role of Weyr mom for some of the younger set. She acted as chaperone as well as a tutor in literature and history.

Remus spotted Doctor Standish embroiled in conversation with Sir Robert and Doctor O'Connor sitting at the same table, but she was intently staring at a screen.

Remus walked over to the buffet laid out and selected his breakfast, then he decided to try to get to know the American's better. With that thought in mind, he walked to their table.

"Do you mind?" he asked.

Mildred O'Connor looked up in surprise, then she shook her head. "No, please sit."

"I know we've been introduced, but I'm afraid I haven't been exactly cordial," Remus explained as he laid out his plate. "I decided to come by and see what's so interesting that its got you ignoring your companions."

The woman blinked and noted her team leader smirking at her. She had been ignoring them! But Sir Robert and Milton were deep in an argument about DNA sequences. She disliked biology and much preferred the cleaner concepts of astrophysics.

"Oh, I was just..." she trailed off and appeared flustered.

Milton Standish grinned broadly and leaned towards Remus. "I take it you haven't much experience with scientists?"

"Just Sir Robert and a few of his people," Remus admitted candidly.

"Sir Robert is a wonderful researcher, but unlike many of us, he has the heart of a teacher. For most scientists, we tend to forget that there's an outside world as we wrestle with our puzzles," Milton said softly. "I've watched Mildred stare at her star charts for hours on end without her saying a single word. It's a failing of the mindset of a scientist, I'm afraid. I'd been accused of the same behavior before I became an administrator."

"Well said," added Sir Robert.

Remus nodded and turned back to the embarrassed woman. "So, what has you so engrossed at this early hour of the morning?"

She tilted her notebook computer and he could see that she had split the screen into several segments. "I'm searching for a needle in a haystack. The dragons have shared several remembered scenes of the night skies of Pern. It's not a lot of information, but I'm hoping to find some clue that might point to where Pern is in our skies."

She pointed out a small window where she had recorded everything she could surmise about Pern, its primary star and the surrounding system. Next to that was an image of a night sky she had reproduced by hand. Below that was another screen that was flipping rapidly through other night skies.

She sighed and shook her head. "It's just not possible to find it," she admitted. "We don't have enough data and don't have enough computing power to work out a position from a single snapshot. It would be easier if we had several, but I have only the one. Several

dragons shared a night sky memory with me, but I quickly realized it was the same memory.

"I'm thinking it would be easier to ask a dragon to jump to that location so we can get more data."

"I'm afraid that isn't possible," Harry said. He had walked up to table during her talk. Remus was shocked by how rumpled he looked. It was as if he'd rushed out of bed this morning.

"What happened to you?" exclaimed Remus.

Harry sat down next to him and shook slightly. "Dragon farts," he muttered darkly. "They're killers."

While Remus choked back a laugh, Harry ran a hand through his hair and looked at Doctor O'Connor.

"Doctor, when Sidraneth made her jump, she came out of Between exhausted and sick," Harry said. "I can take you on Chekiath to Sydney Australia in the time it takes you to cough three times. Sidraneth's jump was much longer than that. How much longer, we don't know, but we do know it was a terribly dangerous jump and we're fortunate she survived to lay her eggs."

"I couldn't order one of my dragons to make that jump until we understand why she got so sick and figured out ways to lessen that danger. And I certainly won't ask a rider to risk their dragon like that."

Mildred nodded. "I can understand that, Weyrleader. Perhaps then the thing to do is to investigate just that. What happens to a dragon when they go Between? A better understanding of that state..." She trailed off and turned to Sir Robert, who was chuckling lightly.

"What?"

"Your zeal is admirable, my dear, but investigating Between has turned out to be a most frustrating task. One day I wired Harry to monitor his physiological responses. We kitted him with temperature sensors, video and audio and sent him between here and Disko Island for twenty trips."

Sir Robert looked very unhappy. "For my effort, I received two minutes of blackness on video, two minutes of listening to Harry's heartbeat and breathing on the audio and two minutes of temperature readings that varied from -20 degrees C to -40 degrees C. The temperature readings were so unreliable I could only assume they weren't accurate. Something about Between interfered with the sensor."

Sir Robert paused and took a sip of his morning coffee. "For my effort, I also exhausted a dragon and a rider so badly that his last return jump had him return nearly a mile away from where he was supposed to be and the pair spent the rest of the day sleeping. Harry never complained about it, but Spath had some sharp words with me over my carelessness."

Harry looked up sharply. "I didn't know that!" he exclaimed.

Sir Robert smiled gently at him. "I know, lad, but the dragons care as deeply about you as you do about them. Spath made it perfectly clear that I was not to endanger you or your dragon again."

Harry nodded, a bit surprised by what he had learned.

"The only definitive thing we can say about Between is that it's not a vacuum like space, nor is it as cold as outer space. A space vacuum would cause the rider to explosively decompress and that doesn't happen. Even a short exposure to that kind of vacuum would result in subcutaneous bruising at a minimum," concluded Sir Robert.

"Weyrleader?"

Harry looked across to O'Connor. "Yes, Doctor?"

"I think I'd like to propose an investigation first into the physiological limits of dragons. Then, once we understand those limits, an examination of what happens to dragons when they go Between."

Sir Robert leaned forward on his chair and looked interested. "You intend to ignore Between except for it's physical impacts on living beings?"

O'Connor looked a little uncomfortable. "This really isn't my field, but from all the descriptions of Between it sounds like it's your classical

null state. Measurements would be totally meaningless. But if we understood what dragons can do normally, then perhaps we can infer things about Between from that."

"I'm sorry? Null state?" asked Remus.

O'Connor smiled briefly at him. "Some current theoretical physics suggest that there are an infinite number of universes sitting side by side. It's only a theory, but in that theory, there are an infinite number of universes where I'm talking to you and you're sitting across from me. Now the problem with this concept is simple. All these universes would be bumping and grinding against each other and we would see cross dimensional traffic between them. So, they proposed that there was a buffer zone, a null state, which isolated each universe and kept them from transferring information between universes.

"The buffer zone would be nearly physically null. Of course, it's only a theory and never been proven one way or another. It's another case of the math suggests several possible answers. This is just one of them. We can't prove it one way or another, but it is possible that Sidraneth's first jump took her Between universes and not just between Pern and Earth," she concluded.

"So you think Between might be this buffer zone," mused Sir Robert. "Astounding! If we could only prove it, it would cause a revolution in physics!"

O'Connor looked uncomfortable. "It's only an idea, sir. But I'm wondering, what if Between can be like falling through the ice for a human? A person falls through the ice and his body goes into shock. He suffers from hypothermia and his system shuts down. A brief dip, like those the Polar Bear Clubs take, cause no damage, but an intense or prolonged immersion is dangerous. What if that's what Sidraneth experienced?"

"Interesting concept," Milton Standish replied. "We'd have to baseline dragons first before we could even attempt any real investigation."

"Excuse me, but what are you three talking about?" Harry said painfully. This conversation had lost him very early on.

Sir Robert held up a hand and Harry turned to look at him. "What Doctor O'Connor is proposing is not that difficult, Harry. The first phase would be to find out things about dragons. For example, a normal human can hold their breath on average from thirty to ninety seconds, depending on how fit the individual is. We know that if you bring the temperature down to 10 degrees C, people start feeling cold. We also know exactly what core temperature a body has to have for hypothermia to set in.

"We don't know any of these things about dragons. What she is suggesting is that if we learn these facts, we can infer things about Between by monitoring dragons when they go Between."

Harry looked down for a long minute. Around him the hall fell silent, watching and straining to hear. The riders had filtered in during the conversation and they knew that something important was in the works.

"All right, I will permit the experiments, but I want one of my riders to observe. Whoever I pick will have authority to shut it down if they feel the dragon is in any danger," he said finally. His gaze roamed over his riders until he settled on Wayne Hopkins.

Wayne had been a Hufflepuff and it appeared that he had transferred his Hufflepuff loyalties to Lordeth, his dragon and dragons in general. Harry turned back to O'Connor, "I'll send Wayne Hopkins over later today to speak with you, Doctor. He'll organize the dragon volunteers for you. But I'll also tell the dragons that if he says to stop cooperating, that's what they'll do."

"That's fine, Harry," Sir Robert said soothingly. "We won't need any volunteers just yet, though. We still have to plan out the experiments. Wayne could also help us there."

Harry smiled at the old scientist and nodded, then he stood and walked to the front of the room. "Can I have everyone's attention please?" he called.

"Wayne, our American friends have an interesting idea that I'd like you to help them with. Please see Doctor O'Connor sometime after breakfast."

Wayne looked up, startled, but nodded.

"One more thing. Every one of you and your dragons came through with flying colors yesterday. The Queen seemed very impressed and I was proud of each of you. I want to thank you for that. You did the Weyr proud," he told them, smiling gently. With a nod to his riders, he walked to the door.

Hagrid met Harry coming in and drew him aside.

"He's not used to leading anything, is he?" asked Mildred O'Connor.

"No, but he still does a good job of it," Remus offered quietly, while watching Harry intently. "His one priority is the dragons and riders. It's only when you get away from that area that he becomes uncomfortable leading."

Harry was speaking with Hagrid and clearly the large man was very upset about something. Finally, Harry placed an hand on Hagrid's arm. He leaned in and spoke to the larger man, who seemed to calm down.

Harry scanned the room, looking for someone, then he spotted Lord James. He turned to Hagrid and said something, Hagrid nodded and quickly left the hall, while Harry turned and walked over to Lord Mills.

James looked up from his breakfast. He normally only spent two nights a week at the Weyr, but considering everyone had been called for the trip to Balmoral, he had spent last night in the Weyr. Usually, Momnarth or one of the other dragons would pick him up mid mornings and bring him to the Weyr.

"Good morning, Harry," James said with a smile. He was especially pleased with how the meeting went yesterday.

"James, we have a problem brewing. As a temporary solution, I need you to immediately purchase one hundred food animals - sheep, goats, cows, pigs, hell I don't care," Harry said tensely.

James looked surprised. "What? Why?"

"Hagrid just informed me that there's a small Weyr in Columbia that's been unable locate enough food," Harry replied. "They're slowly starving. Fortunately, it's a small Weyr like Lac Logippi. Once

breakfast is over, I'm taking the wings there with a supply of beasts from our herd to help hold them over."

James nodded. "Yes, we have enough funds, but we can't afford to feed all of the Weyrs."

"I know. Like I said, this is only a stop gap measure. Once we've moved past this, we'll try to figure out other solutions," Harry replied.

"I'll get on it right away." James replied.

Harry nodded and followed the man from the hall.

Inside the hall every rider paused in eating while their dragons informed them of an important meeting after breakfast.

#10 Downing Street, London, May 2nd...

"Sir, a courier has arrived with a packet of documents from the Queen."

Prime Minister Major nodded to himself and reached for the intercom button. "Please bring it in."

The door opened a moment later and his secretary handed him a thick manila envelope. He nodded his thanks and opened the envelope. Inside were royal writs overturning the warrants on Sirius Black, Harry Potter and Albus Dumbledore. Additionally, there was a hand written note from the Queen reminding him that if Harry Potter was to be treated as a national leader, then diplomatic immunity should be extended to him.

"What a mess," he muttered. "It's too soon. We need more time."

"Sir, if I may?"

Major jumped and looked around wildly. He had forgotten about the wizards hiding in his office. Taking a deep breath, he looked at Major Parks. "You have something you wish to say, Major?"

"It's not my place to suggest a course of action, sir, but if you send those writs to your legal people and ask them to rewrite them before forwarding them onto the muggle liaison office, I'm sure they won't

have a clue what they really say," Parks said. Only his head was visible.

The Prime Minister looked down at the single sheet writs and understood. Translated into the worst of lawyer speak and sent to an office that nobody at the Ministry of Magic paid any attention to was a stroke of genius!

"Major, that is a wonderful idea," the Prime Minister said with a sinister smile. It was the kind of smile that would send voters running for the other guy.

Parks returned the grin, then he pulled up the hood on his cloak, happy that he was able to help the boss with his problem.

Hangar #2, Campbeltown Weyr, May 2nd...

Harry strode into the hangar where all three wings were assembled and he hopped up on the stage. Turning to face the riders, he saw that they were already kitted out in their flight suits.

"Here's the deal, riders. Hagrid is going to give us jump coordinates for Romeral Weyr in Columbia, South America. This was a very small reserve, on the order of Lac Logipi, in Kenya. Most of the other Weyrs have been able to forage for food after the herds maintained by the wizards ran out. In a few cases, they've been outright pilfering animals from wizard owned herds. Something has happened at Romeral, however, which is making foraging especially difficult.

"I've asked Lord Mills to get us some food beasts that we can provide them, but that will take a few days. In the meantime, we're going to take a trip to Romeral. Each rider will pick a beast from our herds to bring to the Weyr. It's not a solution, only a temporary fix, but it should buy us a few days. When Lord Mills comes through, that should buy us a week. Once the dragons have been fed and we have passed this crisis, we need to come up with a solution to this problem and make sure that no other Weyr is in the same boat."

"Questions?"

Silence met his call for questions. Everyone understood how important this was. After a minute of silence, he smiled tightly. "Fine, let's get to it."

Less than an hour later, they emerged from Between above a small volcanic mountain surrounded by heavy forest. Harry looked around curiously, then his focus shifted. Below him, a well worn caldera of an extinct volcano erupted with trumpeting dragons, booming their welcome.

Harry was very alarmed to see a great many of the dragons were gray with hunger.

"Sinnath, please tell Draco that I want his wing to make an aerial survey of the surrounding area once you've delivered your loads," Harry sent. "I want to know what kind of animals we have around here, what the forest is like, that kind of thing."

"Yes, Weyrleader," Sinnath replied.

Harry glanced over to see Draco nod and wave at him.

"Weyrleader, welcome to Romeral Weyr! I am Justh, senior dragon of the Weyr."

Harry oriented on the voice and Chekiath obliged by changing his course to land in front of a large male Norwegian Ridgeback.

"Thank you for your welcome, Justh. Let's see about getting your people fed, then we'll talk about how we can fix your problems."

"Eat, Justh," Chekiath urged, "You're gray."

Chekiath carefully placed a large sheep in front of Justh. The large dragon eyed the animal for a moment then he bit down on the neck of the animal, killing it instantly.

"Thank you, Weyrleader. I had been giving my catches to the yearlings, but every day we have to fly farther and farther. The rains have not come this year and the animals are dying. Even the forest withers around us," Justh replied as he tore into the sheep.

"Drought?" Harry murmured, then he looked over to see May approaching. The weyr was smaller than Lac Logipi, with only about sixty dragons, and he could see his dragons delivering their loads to those who seemed to need them the most.

"May, you know how to use the internet, don't you?" he asked.

May paused and nodded, surprised by the question. Since their computers had been networked together, they did have an internet connection, but only the non-magical riders had any expertise with it.

"Justh says they're in a drought. Maybe we can confirm that and see if we can find a long range forecast for the area?" Harry offered.

May nodded thoughtfully. "I'll check when we get home, Harry."

Harry watched as Justh and the others ate, some of them for the first time in over a week. "Justh, I'm sorry I didn't know about this sooner," he said softly.

"Harry," May chided, "you can't possibly know what's happening in every Weyr, all the time."

Draco and his wing sprang aloft. He knew they were getting ready for their survey, but if Justh was right, then the problem was obvious. The solution, however, escaped him. Even magic couldn't create enough rain to be of use.

"May, help Hagrid set up to inspect the dragons, especially the younger ones. I want to make sure none of them are in any trouble. I'm going up to the rim to look things over. If there are still dragons needing to be fed, send some riders back to Campbeltown for more beasts."

Harry climbed back onto Chekiath and they leapt aloft, while May walked down to where the riders were congregating, shouting orders. As assistant Weyrhealer, she had an authority that superseded even the Wing Leaders.

Chekiath spiraled up above the bowl of the ancient caldera, then he spotted a suitable place to land on the rim.

"It's a good Weyr," Chekiath said.

Harry slid down from his dragon and looked around. The mountain was about three thousand meters tall and looked as though it had been dormant for hundreds of years. The interior of the caldera was

dotted with old lava tubes that the dragons were using for their personal Weyrs. One side of the caldera had collapsed some time ago and it opened up into a rift valley that looked greenish brown with vegetation.

"It does look like a good spot, Cheki, but like Disko, this place can no longer support the Weyr," Harry said. He reached into his pocket and pulled out a small world atlas he had gotten from Emma. She had marked Columbia in the book, something which he was grateful to see.

Opening it to the marked page, he frowned. It showed major roads and towns, but it was far too small a map for anything else. Emma had circled the district they were in on the map, but it didn't show the volcanoes which dotted the landscape. From his vantage point he could even see one smoking in the distance.

"This isn't much help," he muttered.

Chekiath looked over his shoulder at the paperback sized map. "It is very tiny," he agreed.

"We're more than one hundred and fifty miles to the coast," he murmured, then he frowned. Weyrs had a strict policy of not hunting in another Weyr's territory, but that was limited by a two hour flight in any direction from the Weyr. Not knowing where the nearest Weyrs were made it difficult to determine if their hunting range was smaller than usual.

Hunting ranges were as far out as a dragon could fly in a two hour straight flight and then only if there were no other Weyrs in the area.

"Selanth says there is a large Weyr less than an hour's flight straight from here," Chekiath offered.

Harry looked up from the map then nodded. "So, drought and two Weyrs that are too close together then," he replied, then looked down towards the bowl where the riders had the Weyr lined up for inspection. He frowned, noting a number of dragons being singled out of the line and sent over to where Hagrid and May were working.

"Selanth," Harry sent, "can you supply jump imagery for that nearby Weyr?"

"Of course, Weyrleader."

An image appeared in his head and he could clearly see a large Weyr living on the side of a very active volcano. He paused, then looked at Cheki, who offered him a leg up. He already knew what his rider wanted.

The pair went aloft and vanished from sight. Three seconds later they emerged nearly two hundred miles south of their position over Nevado del Huila.

The Weyr below him was huge! There had to be nearly as many dragons here as at Campbeltown, and Campbeltown was one of the largest Weyrs on the planet.

Dragons bellowed in surprise and welcome, spotting the intruder over their skies. They had not been expecting anyone to visit, let alone the Weyrleader.

A large group of dragons rose from the bowl to welcome the Weyrleader and escort him down to the Weyr proper. A quick examination of the caldera showed the volcano had created a string of successive bowls from north to south, with the northern most bowl still belching smoke. The Weyr was situated some five kilometers away in the southern most bowl.

It was a situation that Harry didn't like at all. Wizards might have picked this location, but it was even more active than Disko island, and he was worried about Disko erupting.

"Who is Senior at this Weyr?" he called.

"I am Mayleth, Weyrleader, senior dragon at Nevado del Huila. Welcome to our Weyr."

Harry oriented on an old Ukrainian Ironbelly with a gray muzzle, who was sunning himself on the rocks. Chekiath altered his flight and landed softly near the large dragon. Mayleth seemed surprised by Chekiath and his eyes started twirling with yellow. Chekiath's growth had slowed considerably, but he was the largest dragon in the world at this point.

Harry slid down from his dragon and patted his side affectionately before turning to Mayleth. "I'm sorry to disturb you, Mayleth, but your brothers to the north are in trouble. Right now, my Weyr is delivering food to the Weyr to help them. I had thought that we could relocate them here, or perhaps just let you both share hunting ranges. But..."

Harry frowned and sat on a rock in front of Mayleth.

"But?" asked a worried Mayleth.

Harry sighed. "I am concerned, Mayleth. You sit too close to a very active volcano. If the mountain explodes you could lose half your Weyr. I know in times past Wizards probably protected the Weyr from being wiped out."

"They did not help us, Weyrleader," Mayleth said. "The last time the mountain barked fire we lost many dragons. But this has always been our home. Where would we go?"

Harry nodded unhappily, then an idea came to him. "I will speak to the Weyrhealer and ask him to visit. When he comes here, he will split your clan into five groups and give each group jump imagery for a place that will welcome them until the mountain calms down. In the meantime, you will set a watch on the mountain so that you will know when there is danger. Also, watch the humans in their villages nearby, as they monitor the mountain also. When they flee, it is time for you to leave."

Mayleth bobbed his head. "It will be done as you say, Weyrleader," he replied, then he turned to Chekiath. "Your rider honors us with his concern. You have given us back our memories of who we are and hope for our future, Chekiath. Your name will be remembered among my clan for all time."

Harry smirked at his dragon. Chekiath's eyes suddenly went into a rapid spin, flashing bluish-green. It was as close as a dragon could come to a blush.

"Weyrleader, please tell Justh that he and his clan are welcome to share our range. There is plenty of food and water to the south of us. In the meantime, I will ask some of our wings to hunt food for them."

Harry smiled broadly. Dragons weren't very territorial now. During the time of beasts, things had been very different. Once they'd rediscovered the ability to speak, most of their problems were solved by talking them out, rather than fighting. "Thank you, Mayleth. I'll bring that news to Justh. You've greatly relieved a concern I had."

Harry stood and started walking back to Chekiath. His blush rose higher and higher as he heard dragon after dragon complement Chekiath for picking him.

Harry climbed onto Cheki's shoulders and waved before giving his dragon the command to jump skyward. For a day that had started out so badly, it had turned around pretty well.

Officially, the first commercial dragon fired power generation station went online in early 1999 in the United Kingdom. Unlike the test station at Campbeltown, which had no public service, the new 500 megawatt plant was capable of powering ten thousand homes. It was the first of the truly clean power stations and it became a model upon which all future power stations were designed.

Excerpted from *The Weyrs of Earth* by Remus John Lupin, published 2040.

Author's Notes and mockeries:

- Questions questions questions. A lot of people ask questions in their reviews and many I try to answer in a pm because I don't have enough room here. So if you're going to ask a question in a review, it's usually best to have your pms turned on unlike UnRealityCheck and vl100butch who both had questions I would have answered. Your answers came in a pm that you refused to accept. Sorry no answers for you!

- Sex, this seems to be a recurring theme in a lot of people's minds and I can't begin to point out just how perverted some of you folks are. Orgies? So not happening. The truth of the matter is there will be some sex, later, much later. This isn't your cliché "omg! I love you to pieces" in an instant fan fiction. No one is going to suddenly realize that they have discovered their soul mate or any of the other blithering junk we're so used to in these stories. Shockingly, I have decided to try to make this a bit more realistic. Live with it folks, there won't be any orgies, Luna isn't going to get it one with six boys.

And the guy that wanted the girls to dress in nun costumes. Just no. Go away you sicko.

- Someone asked about Dobby. This is something that puzzles me, Dobby is a bit player like Hedwig. He's there in the background running around doing his thing. There's no real reason to see him every chapter. If I were to write a story about a race car driver and his car would I have to tell you about the car's tires every chapter to remind you they are there?

- Elfwyn, the British government did ask permission to bring the scientists in. I figured you would be able to connect the fact that the PM telling the American Ambassador that they would have to ask the Weyrleader and assume that they asked. Guess I was wrong eh?

- JustWriter2, Fudge's secretary is a lot like Crewman Number Six on Star Trek. We don't know him, he's there to die a gruesome and agonizing death because the main characters aren't allowed to die. (Unless they want to leave the show and can get out of their contract.) Now to make you feel better, I've arranged for her to kill Fudge after this story is complete by running him over with a steam roller.

- Finally JustWriter2 I want to put this issue of Charlie Weasley to bed for all time. He's not coming to the Weyr. Only one group of dragon handlers would be considered acceptable to the dragons and Charlie Weasley isn't among them. The NAACP is not about to hire former KKK members to handle event security for obvious reasons and the dragons feel the same about dragon handlers. The only exception are those from Maziang the ONLY reserve in the world that didn't kill dragons. Nuff said.

- Djay, there is nit picking and there is micronit picking. So what would you call it when your male dragon went on their first mating flight? We realize that Anne focused on the queens and their mating, but there are no queens in this story. When Chekiath goes on his first mating flight, its easy enough to say he rose to his first flight. We're sorry if this disturbs you, but since these dragons are more than fifty thousand years removed from Pern, let's just say evolution and lack of vocabulary allowed the males to rise also.

- Thundergod Stormbringer, wow, what a name! Anyway, yeah we like action scenes too, but this isn't television where we have to keep you glued to your seats by interspersing boobies and exploding cars. No reading people are smarter than that and they understand that action scenes have build up, there's politics and nitty gritty details, that might bore you, but ReaderX complains if he doesn't see those scenes. And there are more people related to ReaderX than there are people related to you.

- And finally Snape. I've had a few pms from people complaining about how I could treat him so harshly. HORSIE POOP! Snape in canon is a despicable and sad excuse for a human being. He delighted in bullying students and insulting them all in the guise of "maintaining his cover". Again HORSIE POOP. Snape didn't need to maintain his cover for the first four years of canon, Voldemort wasn't back. Anyway I hate Snape. So don't ask me to hook him up with anything other than an anchor and a rope. Don't complain to me that he's a misunderstood good guy who's been mistreated. My violin doesn't play hearts and flowers. I cheered when he bit it and complained that it wasn't gruesome enough. So Snape on a rope? Yes Please.

Standard Disclaimer:

Alyx bounced onto the stage and smiled brightly at the audience. She wore a full length apron that was smattered and splattered with bits of red stuff. From one of the wings the audience could clearly hear the sounds of someone groaning in intense pain.

She brandished a sword in one hand and a hammer in the other, both were covered in gore. "Its that time folks! Time for another chapter and time for me to pick a lucky victim... er winner for this weeks 'Help Alyx with her art' contest!"

"WAIT WAIT WAIT!" shouted Bob, running onto the stage.

Alyx turned and glared at him. "What!" she spat.

"I received a message from Supreme Headquarters for International Terrorists!" Bob exclaimed.

"My favorite people! Did you know that invited me back to give another lecture? My talk on two hundred ways to torture people using garden tools was very well received," she said happily.

"Yeah well your demonstration on Ali Ben Shishkabob didn't work out so well. Plus they are complaining that we're giving them a bad name because we don't have a cause and we use sex as a torture method."

"We don't use sex as torture!" she exclaimed.

Bob stared at her, then shook his head. "Did you or did you not force Ron Weasley and Severus Snape to..."

"No! They wanted to do that all by themselves! They volunteered!" Alyx retorted.

"Really? With ground glass shards in the condoms?" Bob asked.

Alyx giggled. "I wanted to make their experience memorable. Besides, that little shit Weasley refused to tell our audience that we don't own Harry Potter or the Dragon Riders of Pern."

Bob sighed. "Well if we don't stop, and if we don't find a cause the folks at Headquarters are going to kick us out if we don't find a cause to champion."

Alyx frowned and walked away muttering dire threats.

Bob sighed and turned to the audience. "I hated to tell her, but now perhaps we can champion free donuts or maybe Llama BBQs."

"I heard that!" Alyx screeched from off stage. "How about championing the right to torture Llama hating husbands?"

"Oh crap, let me start the story for you while I try to calm her," Bob muttered. "Enjoy the chapter."

Dragon meat is a well known delicacy. In fact, many of the top restaurants of wizarding Europe offer some of the most exquisite dragon dishes. Dragon meat is shipped in fresh daily from the reserves around Europe, although there is no truth to the rumor that dragons are deliberately culled for their meat. If you ever find yourself in a position to sample it, you'll be in for an unparalleled culinary treat.

Excerpt from *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find them* by Newt Scamander. Published 1927.

Flint Manor, Devonshire, May 2nd...

It was late, nearly midnight, but no one heard the sound of one hundred people arriving via portkey. The Flints were one of the families that locked down their manors after calling in the entire family. Roughly fifty to sixty people were living in the manor and the Ministry knew they had been trying unsuccessfully to arrange alliances with other families for several days.

The Ministry knew this because they had managed to intercept a few of the owls being sent out.

Brent Thompson motioned and several men came over to where he was standing, just on the edge of the wards. "Get the warding teams to put up our own wards, then we'll begin draining theirs," he said tensely. He had one hundred men on the assault and another three

hundred that made up an outer perimeter, just in case someone tried to come to the aid of the Flints.

It was doubtful that anyone would aid the Flints, but stranger things had happened.

Ten minutes passed in tense silence, then came the sound of a bell peeling from the manor and lights came on. They knew they would detect the anti-apparation and anti-portkey wards the Ministry men were placing, but now it was too late. The Flints would either have to fight off the Ministry, or submit when they finally broke through the wards.

Thompson waved and a team of ten men ran up to edge of the ward and cast shields. Five of the best ward breakers the Ministry could hire from around Europe followed close behind. Between the five of them they expected to have the wards down in a few hours.

Untrained ward busting would have taken days or even weeks, even with war wards.

Spellfire erupted from the manor and it splashed harmlessly against the shields. Then the people up in the Manor switched to Killing Curses. Four of the shielding men dropped before the rest conjured marble slabs to hide behind.

Thompson growled to himself and made a silent promise. There would be no survivors from the attempt of the Flint family to foment a coup d'etat . He'd see to that personally.

Campbeltown Kitchen Hall, May 3rd...

Harry entered the hall and walked over to grab himself a cup of coffee. Yesterday had been tiring and he had spent a good deal of the night working up a plan to address the problems he saw. Taking a sip of his coffee, he walked to the front of the hall and waved to catch the attention of his riders.

"Good morning," he said quietly as those in the hall stilled. "If you're like me, then yesterday was a bit of a shock and it highlighted a couple of major problems. With the sole exception of Hagrid and May, most of us never visited another Weyr until yesterday.

"That's going to change, starting today. We need to visit every Weyr in the world."

He paused and grinned at the stunned expressions that met his declaration. "We need to learn where each Weyr is so we can locate them on a map. We need to know how many dragons live in each Weyr, and if the Weyr is in a dangerous location, like Nevado del Huila, or barely feeding their dragons, like Romeral."

Dan stood in the back of the room and Harry looked at him questioningly. "What will you do if they are in danger, Harry?"

He shrugged. "Honestly, Mr. Granger, I don't know. But I would rather know about a problem developing before it becomes a crisis than to deal with what happened at Romeral. Some of those dragons were ill from lack of food.

"Right now, Hagrid is the only person who has been to nearly every Weyr. We don't really know how many dragons there are world wide, though we guess it's about ten thousand or so. We need to know these things so that we can better help our dragons.

"Yesterday I found myself at a loss. I had a little map with me and I couldn't locate the Weyr on that map, nor did I know there was another Weyr nearby. That meant Romeral had a much smaller hunting range in one direction. Add the drought on top of that restriction and you have a recipe for dragons starving. I won't allow that to happen again."

Harry flipped open a pad which he had been drawing on as he spoke, then he held it up. It was a simple diagram of two circles that partially overlapped.

"A Weyr obtains its food from two basic sources," he said, then he gave them a nasty grin. "They pilfer food beasts from wizard herds. Wizards tend to ward their pasture lands, which stand out like a sore thumb to dragons thanks to their ability to see magic. They also occasionally help themselves to muggle livestock, but I have requested that they refrain from doing so unless it's an emergency. The second main source of food comes from foraging wild animals. That works well in areas where there are a fair amount of animals to hunt, like Africa and parts of Asia and South America.

"The problem is that a Weyr has a hunting range of two hours straight flight time. That's a really big area, and if it overlaps with another Weyr, then no one hunts in that overlapped zone as a courtesy. To make sure this doesn't happen again, we need to know where each Weyr is and how many dragons they have."

"A census and location of all the Weyrs? It's a fine idea, Harry," Sir Robert exclaimed. "I have a portable GPS unit in my office you can use to locate your position on a map."

Draco stood and looked over to Sir Robert, then he turned to Harry. "I'll volunteer my wing to make the census," he said, then he glanced over to Hagrid. "If Hagrid can provide the imagery, we'll start with the nearest Weyrs and work outward from there."

Hagrid nodded. Not that long ago, Draco would have sneered and spat at the half giant, but now they were almost friends, bound by their love of dragons.

"I'll be happy to help" Hagrid said with a bit of a rumble.

"Good man Hagrid," Harry murmured, then he turned to Sir Robert. "Would you get together with Lord Mills and help him figure out what kind of maps we'll need so he can order them? I'd like to have at least one large map for Hangar Two with all of the Weyrs listed on it, plus maybe a few smaller wall maps and portable maps."

Sir Robert frowned. "Are all of the Weyrs located in volcanic calderas?"

Harry shrugged and turned to Hagrid.

"I don't rightly know, to be honest. But it seems tha' most o' the Weyrs aren' in an old volcano. So far, the only Weyrs yeh've seen, Harry, are at volcanoes. But most aren'."

Sir Robert nodded. "Maybe a stripped down topographical map might be best," he mumbled, then he nodded to Harry. "I'll speak to Lord Mills about it."

"Harry?"

"Yes, Hermione?"

"Do you recall our talk about visiting Maziang this summer?"

He nodded.

"Why not make it a full Weyr visit to every Weyr? We could still spend a week at Maziang, but spending at least a night at each Weyr would be a good way to promote unity among the Weyrs."

"There is no problem with unity among the Weyrs," Chekiath said proudly. "But visiting each Weyr would make the clans very happy. They know how the Weyrleader feels about them. They can feel it. My rider visiting the Weyrs would make it more personal to the dragons."

Harry stood silently for a minute, his gaze fixed on the floor while he considered it, then he looked up at the others and grinned. "We'll conduct the census still, but I don't see anything wrong with the idea of visiting the Weyrs, perhaps before we go to Maziang. But I think I'm going to add that as a requirement for riders. Hagrid?"

The big man looked up from his large cup of tea. "Aye?"

"It's important that each new rider learn jump imagery. I'm going to suggest that at the end of the Weyrling training, instead of returning to their home Weyrs, we take them on a trip to every Weyr. We'll give the riders cameras so they can build a book of jump imagery, then we'll take them on a tour before sending them home."

"That's a great idea, Harry," exclaimed Remus.

Buckingham Palace, May 3rd...

"Sir Robert and Albus Dumbledore are here, Ma'am," said a man standing at the door.

The Queen looked up and nodded. "Very well. Send them in please."

She closed the file and placed it off to one side. At her request, the PM's office had initiated a search of all of the historical archives so that they could identify the exact role of the Ministry of Magic within the context of the British Monarchy. The search continued, but it was

looking more and more like the limited autonomy that had been granted was predicated on conditions now broken.

"Sir Robert," she said with a slight smile. "Welcome. Do sit down."

"Thank you, Your Majesty. You recall Albus Dumbledore," Sir Robert said softly.

She looked over at the wizard thoughtfully for a moment. "Yes, I do," she replied firmly.

Albus nodded a bit nervously and sat down. Like many in his generation, he still held the British Monarchy in high regard, although he had fonder memories of earlier monarchs than the one before him now.

"Mr. Dumbledore, like the family of Harry Potter, we have had our people look into you as much as they can. There are a great many things that can be laid at your feet. Things of questionable nature, sir, not the least of which was ignoring the wishes of parents when it came to the placement of their child."

Dumbledore sighed and nodded tiredly. "Ma'am, the actions of the past are always judged by the perceptions of today. All I can say is that, at the time, it seemed like a smart move. We had a fifteen month old orphan who became an instant celebrity in my world and an instant target for anyone still harboring ideas about pureblood supremacy.

"It never occurred to me that his family would mistreat him. When they started to do so, there had already been two attempts to harm the child from wizards that the wards had stopped. The Dursleys never knew how close they came to death on those nights. Removing him from the safety of those wards would have exposed him to a greater danger.

"As much as I might wish it were otherwise, I know I had a hand in what happened to Harry, both at home and at school. I regret that more than you will ever know. All I can do now is work to make things better between myself and Harry and for his riders."

The Queen nodded slowly. "Yes, we understand you left with those students who went to the Weyr from your school, and have been helping them with their magics, as well as helping my government with our current crisis. In fact, it is only the obvious acts of contrition that have thus far stayed our hand, sir."

The Queen paused and glared at Dumbledore for a moment before her gaze softened. "As you say, they are acts of the past. So let us leave them in the past and talk about how to proceed in the present."

She reached for the file folder from the Home office and opened it. "It is the opinion of our experts that the Ministry of Magic is still beholden to the Monarchy. In fact, the experts believe it all revolves around the last official contact between the wizarding world and the Monarchy, with the signing of the Treaty of Lancaster in 1142. Said treaty outlined the Wizarding autonomy and its limits."

Dumbledore frowned and shook his head. "That might be true, Ma'am, but I can assure you that the current Ministry of Magic would not be willing to abide by those limits, let alone acknowledge your authority over them."

"Perhaps not," she replied slowly, "but it does grant us the precedent to enforce our will on those who would break the treaty. Mr. Dumbledore, surely you can see that we stand on the very brink of a civil war if we can not find a compromise acceptable to both sides."

"I can, Ma'am. I have given much thought to that possibility and have tried to give the best advice I can. Sir Robert has shown me some of what your military is capable of doing. I fear we have the ability to hurt each other very much, but I do not doubt the outcome of such a war. Your forces would prevail."

"We find little comfort in that assurance," the Queen murmured.

Dumbledore sighed. "As do I. The price would be terrible on both sides, but the Ministry of Magic is on a course of self destruction but the people leading the charge do not see the disaster they are plunging towards. If they attack the goblins, the goblins will ruin their economy and that would force the wizards to turn to your world to get what they need."

"If they don't attack the goblins, then sooner or later your own government will demand justice for the crimes that have been committed and again we will have conflict. And when you factor in the dragons?" He sighed.

"Yes, the dragons pose some formidable problems themselves. Our government recognizes that they represent a force that we would be ill equipped to fight."

"Begging your pardon, Ma'am, but I think I know the Weyrleader well enough now to say he doesn't want to fight anyone. Were you briefed in regard to the incident in Kenya?" asked Sir Robert.

She nodded. "Yes, Prime Minister Major explained what happened."

"What he probably didn't tell you is that the Weyrleader came back to the Weyr and wept bitterly over having to kill anyone. He is a young lad who could have been a monster, given his upbringing, but I have seen graduates of Sandhurst who don't have as much integrity as the Weyrleader does," Sir Robert said.

"I admit that Harry Potter could have been a monster, but he has more love in him than anyone I have ever seen. It's almost magical. But I have no doubt that Harry will kill again in his life. He is dedicated to protecting his dragons and his friends. Right now the dragons are still being threatened by the Wizards," Dumbledore added. "Harry will do anything to protect a friend. It's only after the fact that his actions will hit him."

The Queen frowned. "We got that impression as well of the young Weyrleader. He carries quite a burden on his shoulders."

"I can think of no person more suited for such a burden, Ma'am, unfair though it may be," Dumbledore said quietly. "Harry doesn't know it, but he's becoming an advocate for all of the non-human intelligences in this world. Dragons are only the tip of the iceberg. Goblins, elves, merpeople, centaurs. The wizarding world has been hiding and suppressing these peoples for centuries. Now the dragons have an advocate, and so do the elves. The goblins have been offered help from the Weyr and Harry is unhappy that they haven't accepted it. I think there will come a time when the Weyrleader will champion the cause of equality for all intelligent species."

The Queen sighed, "And because of his upbringing, he no longer considers himself British."

"Yes, that is true," Sir Robert admitted sadly.

"He never considered himself a wizard either, Ma'am," Dumbledore added.

She nodded. "Yes, he has found his place. He is the Weyrleader of a noble and beautiful race. We have spoken twice now with Narth who leads the dragon guard. The depth of experience his race has witnessed is breathtaking. Equally breathtaking is the loyalty he has for his Weyrleader."

Sir Robert grinned. "As Harry so often says to his riders, dragons are not human, and while they understand a great many concepts and human values, they do not always have human responses. An individual dragon is dedicated to his rider, and to the Weyrleader."

The Queen smiled thinly. Her second conversation with Narth had been about the differences between a Lady Holder and a Queen. She had found it amusing, but quickly realized that, despite their intelligence, there were some concepts that the dragons simply didn't have a frame of reference for.

The Queen looked down at her file for a moment, then came to a decision. "It is our intent to ask our Prime Minister to see that Campbeltown is ceded to the Weyr. As Mr. Dumbledore so aptly points out, the actions of the past are judged in light of the perception of the future. Helping dragons is morally correct. Helping them now will speak to our future and say we did not ignore the plight of an intelligent race.

"The time comes when dragons will be revealed to the world and we will not sit idly by while people argue if they are to have rights or not. When the time comes, we shall stand with our new friends. It is unfortunate that they cannot speak. Radio and Television would go a long way in telling their story."

"Perhaps something can be done about that, Ma'am," Sir Robert murmured. "With your permission, I will look into it."

She eyed the scientist for a moment, then nodded. "Do so, Sir Robert. If we can give the dragons a voice it would help convince the world." She turned back to Dumbledore. "Go back to your students and continue helping them, Mr. Dumbledore. Bear in mind, we are watching and will continue to do so."

Both Dumbledore and Sir Robert stood. Both men bowed from the neck. "Thank you, Your Majesty," Sir Robert murmured, then they backed from the room.

Svartvatn Weyr, Norway, May 5th...

Draco dropped lightly to the ground and looked around with interest. The lake was still and reflected the nearby mountain with a mirror like quality. Snow still lay on the mountain and the chill kept him from pulling off his gloves and helm as he'd done at the other Weyrs they'd visited in the past two days. They were running roughly two Weyrs per day but they had encountered no great problems at any of them.

"Who's senior dragon?" he asked, turning to the dragons that assembled around his wing.

An aging Norwegian Ridgeback stepped forward. "I am Fith, senior dragon at Svartvatn. Welcome to our Weyr. Other than the Weyrhealer, we have never seen other riders."

Draco oriented on the older dragon and bowed slightly. "I am Draco, Sinnath's rider, and Wing leader of Wing three. This is Michelle, Wivaronth's rider, my Wing second. The Weyrleader has asked us to visit each Weyr to count the number of dragons and to make sure your Weyr is capable of supporting your clan."

"We have heard what happened at Romeral, Wing leader. Our Weyr is good and there is plenty to eat," Fith replied.

Draco nodded. "It does look good," he murmured. "But we'll look around anyway, Fith. We have plans to ensure the riders can come to any Weyr in the world. Some of my people will take some pictures of the Weyr from the air while we get a count of your clan. Come the summer, the Weyrleader will bring the Weyr here for a visit. He wants to talk to the senior dragons and look over your Weyr."

"We will be honored, Wing Leader," Fith replied.

Michelle spoke quietly and two of the wing's dragons jumped aloft to take aerial photos, while the others spread out, counting the dragons and recording names. Harry hadn't asked for names, but Michelle suggested it and Draco couldn't think of a reason not to record the names.

Michelle was creating a fact sheet for each Weyr that would contain photos of the Weyr, its position taken from the GPS unit that Sir Robert taught her to use, and the names of the dragons so that they knew who to talk to if problems arose. Each sheet went into a book and when the book was complete, they'd make sure every rider got a copy.

Satisfied that the Wing was doing what they should, Michelle walked over to Draco. "It's beautiful here. So peaceful," she murmured.

"Cold though," he replied. "It's May and they still have a lot of snow here. The dragons don't feel cold or heat like we do, so this is comfortable to them. Hagrid was right. We've visited four Weyrs so far, counting this one, and not a one was in a volcanic bowl. "

He pointed to a series of holes in the side of the hill. It was obvious they were burned out by dragon fire and it was also obvious that they were very new. Prior to their awakening, they had been penned in by the dragon handlers who maintained the reserve. He could still see the remains of the large shed where they processed the culls. Sometime after they had awakened, the dragons had burned the shed to the ground.

"I wonder when they did that?" he murmured, pointing to the new holes.

"It was after the time of the beasts," Fith answered. "When we chased the wizards away, we wanted to be more comfortable, so we created our Weyrs. Being inside when the wizards come back means we can surprise them easier."

Draco nodded. That was another issue he'd have to bring up with Harry. Every Weyr was reporting wizards probing to see if they could regain control. Sooner or later, people or dragons were going to get killed.

Campbeltown Weyr, May 5th...

"James, do you have a moment?" Albus said from the door.

"Good morning, Albus. And yes, I do. Come in," James called from his desk. His work at the Weyr was taking up more and more of his time, so Harry arranged for Momnarth to pick him up every morning he was due to come over and fly him in from the Isle of Arran.

Dumbledore walked in and sat down. "You look a little frazzled this morning, James. Is there something wrong?"

James chuckled and shook his head. "No, not exactly wrong. I went home last night to find May and Trath visiting with her parents and Angus. She had brought Angus one of your magical potions and after he got over his coughing fit from the taste he was a changed man."

Dumbledore arched an eyebrow in surprise. He knew May was studying to be a Weyrhealer under Hagrid, but hadn't realized she was dabbling in potions or dispensing them to normals. "Oh?"

James nodded. "The McNulty's have worked for my family for seven generations, Albus. You would be hard pressed to find a finer or more loyal family. Angus has been the game keeper for my family for nearly twenty five years and his son would soon replace him. If anything, the McNulty's had one flaw in the men. Arthritis usually cripples them first in body, then in spirit. Angus was planning on retiring soon because the illness was that advanced."

James looked unhappy, "I didn't want him to retire. His son would make a good game keeper, but I knew that retiring would kill him."

"And May's potion fixed him?" prompted Albus.

James nodded fervently. He had dreaded the man retiring, considering Angus more a beloved Uncle than a loyal employee.

Albus smiled gently. "One of the reasons why we went into hiding was because we couldn't heal the world. Magical herbs and plants do not grow in abundance, like corn or wheat. Demand outgrew supply, and when the potions couldn't be made, people were killed.

Some thought we were deliberately withholding cures but that wasn't the case.

"Use of potions like this to help your immediate family is one of the things we understand a muggle born might do. I'll speak to May and explain that, while she can make potions for her family, they mustn't tell anyone how they became cured. Then I think I will insist she also attend my evening potion tuition."

James smiled, "Thank you," he said softly. The one thing he wanted to know but was afraid to ask was if the wizards could have cured uterine cancer which took his wife five years ago. Some things weren't worth knowing.

"It is a minor matter. Not everything is curable. May's grandfather is lucky that he had a condition that we wizards also contract. Not all diseases and illnesses that you normals catch affect us," Albus said, then he straightened. "James, I came here for a reason."

He passed the paper across the desk. James quickly spotted the article about the Wizarding Defense Force putting down an attempted coup d'etat run by the Flint and McMillan families. The article explained that the WDF continued to search out the other ring leaders of the coup.

James read the article twice, then he looked up at Albus. "What does this mean, exactly?"

"It means that the Ministry is clearing out any opposition it may have in the Wizengamot. The Flints were a large and notoriously dark oriented family, while the McMillan's were also large and mostly neutral, politically speaking, even if they were light magic users.

"I dare say we'll see other families being arrested or killed off in the next few days. The WDF is removing the last stumbling blocks to someone in the Ministry gaining domination."

James frowned. "Won't the people rise up in protest over this?"

"I'm afraid not," Albus replied, shaking his head. "I'm afraid the average wizard will prefer to cower in his home and hope the troubles don't come to his door. The few with the gumption to take a stand end up eventually at the top of society and on the Wizengamot.

Families like the Bones, the Potters or the Blacks are the exception, not the norm.

"I think this," he said, pointing to the paper, "is just the first step towards someone gaining absolute control inside the Ministry. What will happen next is hard to say, but I think that once they have consolidated their power base, they will move on the goblins."

"This is insane," James muttered.

"It's only the tip of the iceberg, James. Conditions are destabilizing all over the world. Some wizarding governments can attribute as much as sixty percent of their economy to the production of dragon products. Spain, for example, had a large dragon population and were major exporters of potions, potion ingredients and other dragon products. Both Italy and Greece relied on their dragon exports as well, and there are already reports of tension rising in both of those countries.

"Some countries, like the United States, aren't as affected because their society is more tightly bound to the mundane economy. There are too many wizards in the States for them to allow a totally pure wizard society, so a great many of them live and work in the mundane world. But other, more traditional countries, the European and eastern European nations, parts of Africa, Asia and the Pacific Rim are being hard hit.

"I wouldn't be a bit surprised to see some of these countries declaring war on each other as they scramble for new sources of income," Albus concluded sadly.

"It won't be just wizards," James added.

Albus blinked in surprise. "What do you mean?" he stammered.

"Albus, our economy is heavily dependent on oil for power. There are nations that command world respect and attention because they have so much oil to sell. The PM and I have talked about this several times, wondering what their reaction will be once word gets out that a new energy source has been found. An energy source, mind you, that will have a serious impact on their economies.

"The PM thinks we're going to see a steadily declining world situation in the next twenty years or so. The dragons won't have a serious impact for years still, but it will happen."

"Have you spoke to Harry about this?" Albus asked.

James shook his head. "No, I haven't. He's been so concerned with the safety of his dragons and his riders, I didn't want to add this concern to his worries. Especially since, right now, the dragons aren't causing any problems."

He took a deep breath and slowly let it out. "Besides, the last thing I want to do is convince him that this age is dangerous to him. I don't want to wake up to discover he's taken his dragons time tripping."

"I don't think he'll do that," Albus said with a smile. "Harry may be a dragon rider, but he's also a product of the time in which he was born. He, personally, has a dragon who could take him back to the time when his parents were killed, but he hasn't done so. He knows the dangers of time travel and respects those dangers."

James looked relieved, then he glanced down at the paper again. "I'll forward this to the PM's office, along with your comments. Thank you, Albus."

Albus stood and gave the man a grandfatherly smile. "You're welcome. To be honest, I find myself looking at the broader picture these days and I find it rather refreshing. The dragons have forced me to look at the world in a new way. I can't believe I missed how connected we all are. Before the dragons, I was concerned with the good of the wizarding world, but that was a myth. The wizarding world cannot exist without muggles, and goblins and even dragons."

With that, he nodded and left James alone with his thoughts.

James chuckled and fired up his computer. It was time to type up Dumbledore's thoughts in a memo to the Prime Minister.

Campbeltown Weyr Hangar #7, Dragon Infirmary, May 6th...

Harry stepped into the large building and absently noted several dragons resting in the stalls Hagrid had set up. Dragons didn't get

sick often, but when they needed Hagrid, he was always there for them.

He looked around until he spotted May. She was sitting at a desk, busily scribbling in a notebook. Around her, several other riders bustled about, preparing to feed the dragons. Some of the dragons got sick enough that Hagrid had developed a mix of meat for them to be fed while in the stall. The dragons weren't overly thrilled with the mixture, but they needed to eat and sometimes they were just in too much pain to move around.

Nearby, a radio played contemporary music, which the dragons enjoyed listening to. He smiled at a dragon who was bobbing his head in time to an Elton John tune playing.

"May," Harry called over the music.

She looked up and smiled broadly. "Hello, Harry. What brings you to the infirmary? Is something wrong with Chekiath?"

"He's fine," Harry replied. "Right now he's outside admiring our latest problem. Hagrid returned from Nevado del Huila about twenty minutes ago with a gift from our friends south of the border."

He grinned at her and she immediately became suspicious.

"Oh? And what does this have to do with me?"

"Well, I'm not sure what to do with them, so I thought I'd ask you about them," he replied, then he pointed towards the door. "You're our resident expert on livestock. Come on, I'll show you."

Perplexed, May followed Harry toward the door. As she moved away from the radio, a strange sound assaulted her ears; a sound she'd never heard before. Harry opened and held the door for her and she nearly staggered under the assault of the braying.

She stepped out of the building to find Hagrid standing amidst a field of the strangest looking creatures. They huddled around him as if he would protect them from the dragons, who were eagerly watching the creatures.

"Llamas!" she exclaimed, then she turned to Harry.

"See? I knew you'd know what they were. I thought they were some sort of strange deformed Pushmepullu," Harry replied. "So... erm, what do we do with them? We don't have enough to give one to every dragon and they are all going to want a taste."

May filed the comment about the Pushmepullu away for later consideration. "No, I suppose we don't want to do that. How many llama are there?"

"According to Hagrid, forty seven," Harry replied. "They are kinda cute. They're almost like a giant hairy sheep."

May scratched her head and tried to think. She knew llama wool was a prized commodity, and keeping a herd of llama wasn't much different than other herd animals, but beyond that, she didn't know. She'd have to look them up and find out if they could let them mingle with their herd of sheep.

Harry grinned. "Well, since it looks like you have things well in hand, I'll leave you to it," he said brightly, glad to dump the problem into someone else's lap.

She whirled around to see him walking away and literally growled at him. "Don't move, buster."

He paused and looked back at her. She raised a hand, one finger extended when it hit them.

"Weyrleader, we're in trouble," shouted a voice in his head.

Instantly, every dragon in the Weyr froze.

"Later," Harry said tensely to May, then he turned and ran to Hangar Two with May on his heels.

"Chekiath, inform the riders that I want a full turn out with their bows in two minutes."

"Yes, Harry."

"Buth, tell me what's happening." Harry commanded, then he threw open the door to the hanger and ran to the weapons cabinet, pulling

out a bow and a box of bolts. Outside, dragons were bellowing in alarm and starting to assemble in front of the building.

"We were visiting Irtys River Weyr when wizards showed up. Draco was hit by a spell and we're fighting them. But some of the riders said not to get hit by the green light, so it's hard to fight so many and avoid the light."

Harry frowned. "Is anyone else hurt?"

"No, Weyrleader. Are you coming here?"

"We'll be there in a few minutes, so hold on," Harry replied tensely.

He trotted out to where Chekiath was waiting, climbed onto his spot and holstered the bow. Looking up, he saw Remus watching him with worry.

"Draco ran into wizards probing the Weyr he was visiting. According to Buth, he was hit with a spell, possibly a stunner, but the wizards are using killing curses. They won't hurt the dragons unless a group masses their spell fire, but the dragons are afraid of getting too close, in case their riders are hit. The dragons are reluctant to kill without permission, so we're going to aid them."

Remus looked shocked, but nodded in understanding. "Be careful, Harry," he said.

Harry nodded grimly in return. He turned back to his riders, who were now mounted and looking at him with more than a bit of fear in their expressions.

"We're going for a high altitude arrival, then we'll come in behind the wizards. Use any bolt except for the unpainted and white ones," he said tensely, then he had Buth feed him jump imagery for a high altitude entry. With that, he pumped his fist twice and the two manned wings sprang aloft.

A second later, another two unmanned, larger wings followed them into the air.

Harry waited until they had all joined up before passing the jump image, then he signaled to Chekiath taking them between. The riders followed immediately, then the unmanned wings.

Albus walked over to where Remus stood, still looking skyward. "A bad business," he murmured.

"A rider is down. Since the dragons aren't keening, he's not dead. Yet. Harry will protect his riders and his dragons," Remus said tensely.

"I will go inform Captain Atkins of what's happening. She'll probably want to alert Corporal Stone," Albus offered.

"I just wish we had a real healer here," Remus replied.

"So do I, Remus, but we'll make do. Fawkes can bring Madam Pomfrey if he's hurt badly enough."

Remus nodded at the older man, who spun in place and vanished, apparating to the security office. The council had reluctantly agreed that Madam Pomfrey was coming to the Weyr too often and they would limit her to serious needs only.

Irtys River, central Russia, May 6th...

Harry and the Wings appeared a moment later over the steppes of Central Russia. He glanced around and took a quick head count.

Nearly one thousand feet below them, streams of dragon fire and curse light arced back and forth across a narrow gully.

"Weyrleader?"

"Yes, Wivaronth, we are above you"

"Michelle says to tell you that there are nearly fifty people attacking. She is very unhappy. Her Draco is badly hurt. We drove them off with dragon fire twice now, but they keep coming back. Michelle wants permission to kill."

Now he understood. With Draco injured and Michelle trying to protect him, the wing must have become pinned down. The Weyr

could have just jumped away, but with Draco down, they rallied to help the riders. It sounded like Draco was more than stunned. If he was injured, taking him Between could seriously aggravate the injury.

Open wounds and Between didn't mix well.

Harry winced. Even at his altitude he could hear Sinnath bellow in rage and anguish over his injured rider.

"Unmanned Wings, sweep the outer edges of the Weyr to make sure no wizards are coming from another direction. If you find any wizards sneaking up, use your strongest fire. Wing one and two, on my command, we will sweep south just a little to get behind them, then we're going to jump to a spot above the wizards and behind them.

"Irtys Weyr, when I say so, I want every dragon to bellow and shoot flame at a low level at the wizards. That will distract them and make them duck," Harry sent.

With a nudge of his knees Chekiath banked and flew in a southerly direction along the river. Harry pulled the crossbow from his holster on his back and threaded a red bolt into the firing mechanism. Around him, twenty other riders copied his movements.

Using imagery from Wivaronth, he passed the jump image to his wings. "Go!" he commanded. Nearly a thousand feet below him, the one hundred and sixty dragons of Irtys River Weyr bellowed and shot long streams of flames.

Harry and his two wings appeared roughly one hundred feet away from the wizards, who were clumped together behind boulders. He leaned out and picked a target, then fired his crossbow. The sharp twang was drowned out in the dismayed cries of the wizards on the ground.

Harry managed to thread another bolt into his bow as Chekiath swooped low over the Wizards, then he pitched up and banked hard, swinging around for another pass. Both wings followed Harry as if they'd had years of practice. He was pleased to see they had taken out more than a dozen wizards in their first pass. Considering he only had twenty riders with him, and that they weren't very familiar with shooting from dragonback, it wasn't a bad first pass.

Their second pass brought them under spellfire, but they were maintaining just enough altitude to make them a difficult shot for the wizards. Firing again, he allowed Chekiath to bank and turn on his own. He reloaded again but he wasn't sure it would be needed. Irtys Weyr decided to charge their positions as they made their second pass. Those Wizards still conscious were now cowering under the angry gaze of so many dragons.

Harry ordered the wings to land close to wing three and Draco.

He slid down from Chekiath's shoulders and glanced over to Ronan. "Ronan, take Luna, Hermione, Katie and Wayne and disarm the wizards. Have our wizards revive them and see that you remove everything from them. Get them stripped down to their boxers if you have you. I'm going to check on Draco."

Ronan nodded and started shouting for people. He ignored the noise and quickly turned to spot Draco laying on the ground, Michelle had his head in her lap. The pair sat next to a small boulder that she had used for cover. Sinnath and Wivaronth were close by and it was obvious that Wivaronth was trying to help keep Sinnath calm.

Stepping over to her, Harry knelt down and looked Draco over. There was a nasty cut across his belly and he was soaked in blood. He frowned, Draco was injured and that posed some difficult problems for them. The wound was very long and very bloody, but it was shallow and didn't seem to expose any organs.

May pushed Harry aside, then knelt down next to Draco. She reached into her kit and pulled out a potion bottle and sprinkled some of the contents on the wound.

"I'm learning to heal dragons, not people," she swore under her breath. She pulled a large bandage from her kit to place on the wound.

"Do what you can, May," Harry said, then he turned to where the dragons had corralled wizards.

Walking briskly over to Ronan, he was shocked to see the wizards unhappily disrobing. Luna was prompting them along with her bow

and the occasional stinging hex. Ronan had taken the wands and other objects and placed them in a pile near Garanoth, his dragon. There was a sizable pile of wands, rings, bracelets, money bags and other items on the ground.

With a gesture to his dragon, the pile was bathed in fire. The wands caught fire immediately, while the metallic items melted under the heat. A number of wizards cried out in dismay, seeing their possessions destroyed.

"Does anyone here speak English?" called Harry.

"The English? You have no authority here," shouted one man in a thick accent, then he stood and tried to look impressive in his boxer shorts. "I am Sergei Petranovich Danakov, cousin of the Minister of Magic. What right do you have to stop our attack! These are our animals!"

Harry walked over to the man and backhanded him, causing the man to cry out in shock as he fell to the ground. Months of climbing up and down the side of his dragon had given him considerable upper body strength. "You injured one of my riders," Harry replied angrily. "You came here to kill our dragons."

"Harry," Hermione said warningly, then stopped when Harry turned to glare at her.

"Be silent!" he commanded angrily.

"Not now, Hermione," warned Comaloth privately. "The Weyrleader needs to show his strength. I know his actions disturb you, but he's doing this for us. All of us"

Hermione stepped back in shock and a bit of fear. Harry was angry with her and she could tell even Comaloth wasn't happy with her for interfering.

"Who here is senior dragon of this Weyr?" he called after he turned away from Hermione. He was furious that she would even attempt to interfere.

A large Hungarian Horntail limped forward. The dragon looked as if he'd taken several nasty blows with banished objects. He was bleeding from one large wound and limping slightly.

"I am Feynith, senior male of this Weyr," said the Horntail.

Several of the wizards exclaimed in shock at hearing the dragon and their group drew closer together in reaction. The thought that these beasts might be capable of thinking terrified them.

Harry nodded. "I thank you for protecting my riders. Your help prevented a greater tragedy today."

The large dragon bobbed his head in acknowledgment. "We were happy to help the Wing leader and we are honored by your presence, Weyrleader."

"Wait here a moment longer, Feynith, then you can go see May, who will tend to your wounds," Harry said, then he turned back to the wizards. "Your wands are destroyed. So are your portkeys and other enchanted objects. If you return to this place, the dragons will kill you. They have my permission to do so. They also have my permission to leave this place and seek a safer land to Weyr. If dragons live here then this place belongs to dragons and no wizard may walk here without our permission."

"You can't do this!" protested Danakov. The man still clutched his face where Harry struck him.

Harry turned a hard gaze on the man, who fell back in fear. "I can do this," he said coldly. "This will be your only warning. The last wizards to anger me died, so do not tempt me. Now leave this place. You are not welcome here."

The dragons of the Weyr bellowed and the wizards cowered back, cringing away from the awesome sound. One by one they apparated away. Harry waited until all of the wizards had vanished before turning back to the others.

Their reactions varied from Hermione's shock to Ronan grinning at him in approval. Most of the riders seemed satisfied with his actions.

He sighed and shook his head. He wasn't sure what he was going to do about Hermione, but something needed to be done and he was too angry to deal with her right now. Turning, he walked back to where Draco lay.

"May?" he said quietly.

"He needs a doctor, Harry. I'm training to heal dragons, not people. The potion I used should prevent an infection, and I managed to get him to drink a little of the pain killer, but I'm afraid to give him too much." she said, then she leaned back on her knees. "I just don't know enough," she whispered, unhappy with that answer.

He reached out and pat her shoulder. "I'm sure you did fine," he said, then he looked around for members of Wing three. "Lee," he shouted, catching his attention.

Lee trotted over to him. He was a member of Wing three, and had also become rather close with Draco. Harry placed a hand on Lee's shoulder and walked him away from where May, Michelle and Draco were. "Lee, I need to you to return to the Weyr. Speak to Albus and see if Fawkes can help bring Draco back to the Weyr. If he can't, or won't, bring back a couple of heavy blankets and we'll wrap him like a mummy before taking him Between. Also, inform Captain Atkins we're bringing one injured rider back who may need a real doctor."

The council had recommended that they refrain from bringing Madam Pomfrey to the Weyr unless it was a life threatening situation. They were afraid, and Harry agreed with them, that they were putting Madam Pomfrey at risk every time she was brought to the Weyr.

Lee nodded. "I'll be back in a flash, Harry," he said, then he ran to his waiting dragon.

Harry walked back to May and touched her shoulder. "You've done all you can. I'm hoping we can get Fawkes to take Draco home. If not, Lee is getting blankets. Check out Feynith, the senior dragon, please. He was bleeding from a large impact wound."

May glanced down at Draco, then stood and looked around. She spotted the large Horntail and picked up her kit before walking over to him.

Harry sat down on the ground near Michelle and he glanced around. Nearby, Draco's Sinnath crooned to Draco, weaving his large head back and forth. The dragon was clearly agitated by the fact that Draco was currently unconscious.

"Sinnath, he is going to be fine," Harry said firmly. He could hear several other dragons telling the anguished dragon the same thing. "He'll be fine," he repeated, although this time to Michelle. She looked up and gave him a weak smile.

"Do you feel up to telling me what happened?" he asked.

"We were taking the census. We were had finished looking over the Weyr and taking the jump photos. Suddenly, Draco shouted something and pushed me to the ground. He made a funny sound, then he fell on my legs." She looked at Harry and her lower lip quivered. "I didn't understand he was even injured until I noticed my legs were wet."

His eyes flicked down to one visible pants leg and it was stained with blood. He grimaced and motioned for her to continue.

"I rolled him off me and then dragged him behind this rock. It was the only cover around. The Wing riders scrambled onto their dragons and went airborne, then the Weyr went airborne, but Sinnath wouldn't leave Draco and Wivaronth wasn't about to leave me behind. Feynith ordered the Weyr to protect Draco, but Lee shouted something about killing curses. It got all hectic and crazy. I told Wivaronth to call you, but Buth was already speaking to you, then I tried to stop his bleeding."

Michelle looked at him, "Harry," she whispered, "that curse should have hit me."

"He'll be fine, Michelle," Harry replied. "The wound is long, but shallow. I didn't see his guts, so I don't think he took a really dangerous hit. The worst part will be getting him home."

"Weyrleader, White Beard is coming to you with the Firebird."

Harry blinked in surprise, then smiled. "Help is on the way," he said firmly to Michelle.

"Thank you, Soranth. Stay at the Weyr. there are enough of us here to help out," he replied silently.

Harry just started to turn around when Albus appeared next to him. Fawkes had obviously used Harry as an aiming point.

Fawkes leaped into the air and trilled a greeting to the many dragons watching. Many of the dragons crooned a welcome to the phoenix. Even during the age of beasts, no dragon had ever killed a phoenix. Something about the magical birds stopped the dragons from harming them. Several of the younger dragons leapt into the air, following the bird in a complex aerial display of flying.

Albus looked around, then he spotted Michelle on the ground. He walked over and knelt by her side, then he carefully peeled the bandage back. He frowned and shook his head.

Fawkes could have healed it, but he was rather fussy about who he helped. Albus had been with him long enough to know that the Phoenix had some way of determining who to help and not to help. If he was going to help he would have already. Albus took comfort from that fact and figured the wound must look worse than it actually was.

Draco took a sharp breath and he blinked his eyes several times before focusing on Dumbledore.

Albus reached out and pat his shoulder. "Rest easy, lad. You have a nasty cut that I can seal for you."

The old man ran his wand over the wound several times, the tip glowing an icy blue. With each pass the wound closed more until it was finally closed. "It's not as good as Madam Pomfrey's work, and he's still going to need to spend some days in bed I'm afraid, but he's going to be fine."

Albus looked up at Harry. "I used an old first aid spell. It's weak and the wound can easily break open with too much movement. That's why he'll need to spend time in bed. Now, I'll take him straight to the infirmary where Corporal Stone is waiting. "

"I understand. He's on bed rest until you or Corporal Stone say otherwise," Harry replied.

Dumbledore nodded, then he smiled at Michelle. "My dear, I'm afraid you'll need to let go of him now. Fawkes could easily take all three of us, but I think your dragon wants to fly you home."

Michelle blushed and moved away from where Draco lay. Dumbledore reached out and took Draco's hand, then he whistled sharply. Harry stood in shocked surprise at the loud sound coming from the old man.

Fawkes, who had been circling overhead, landed on his shoulder and a second later he vanished in a burst of flame, taking Draco and Dumbledore with him.

"Michelle, take your wing home. We'll follow when we're done here," Harry ordered.

"Sinnath, can you follow Wivaronth home?" he sent.

"To Draco?" asked the unhappy dragon.

"Yes, she'll take you to him," Harry replied, then he turned to Michelle. "Guide him to the infirmary building, but try to help him stay calm. I don't want a thirty five foot long dragon breaking into the infirmary to get to his rider."

Michelle smiled weakly and nodded, then she turned to Sinnath. "Come on, love. Let's go home and see how Draco's doing."

He stood and waited until a rather shaky group of riders had vanished before turning back to the others. "Marty, I want your wing to take the census for this Weyr. If Wing three didn't finish their survey, or gather enough jump photos, we'll come back for them. Also, have some people look for our spent bolts. We'll need to recharge them."

Marty Benson nodded. Turning, he signaled to Hermione and his wing to gather around while he issued orders.

Harry walked over to where May was working with Feynith. She knelt on the ground and was busy slathering a foul smelling yellow

paste onto the open wound. Feynith moaned softly and Harry instinctively reached out with his magic to dampen his pain. Feynith's eyes whirled and he looked at Harry.

"Thank you, Weyrleader."

May glanced up at him with a questioning look.

"I dampened his pain with my magic. It won't last long, but it should hold him until you finish up and get a pain potion into him," he said, answering her question. He moved closer and knelt next to May, examining the wound. "So this is the bandage paste you and Hagrid came up with?"

She nodded. "It's nearly impossible to bandage a dragon if the wound is on the body. Even a small cut requiring a bandage would need yards of the stuff." she murmured as she scooped up some more paste from a large jar. She rubbed it into the wound, filling in the hole. "By grinding dragon scales into a powder and using a mixture of epoxy, silica gel and a few other compounds, we created a biologically neutral adhesive. It seals the wound and protects it from infection. In five days or so it will fall off all by itself. By then the wound will be mostly sealed. It'll leave a scar, but dragons aren't all that concerned about scars. Unfortunately, hide is too tough to suture unless we want to use steel wire. Hagrid probably has the strength needed to punch through the hide, but I don't."

She leaned back on her knees and carefully pushed some hair out of her eyes. Her hands were full of the foul smelling goop. "Hagrid and I will come back in a five days and check to see if we need to reapply the adhesive."

Harry picked up the jar of adhesive and examined it carefully. His nose crinkled at the foul smell, but looking up at the yellow paste on Feynith's flank, he knew it covered a hole the size of a soda can. "How does it feel, Feynith?" he asked.

The dragon sighed gratefully and turned his long neck to look at both of them. "It smells really bad, Weyrleader, but it feels much better."

May blushed. "I'm sorry about the smell, Feynith. To be honest, we never worried about the smell until the dragons first started

complaining about it. Hagrid and I are already looking into ways of making it less pungent."

Harry reached for a small towel in May's bag and handed it to her. She smiled and wiped her hands clean of the paste.

"This is really good stuff, May," Harry said softly. "This is exactly the kind of stuff we need." He smiled broadly and reached out to gently pat her shoulder. "You and Hagrid should be commended for your ingenuity."

She blushed and looked down, cursing her pale complexion for giving her blush away so easily.

Harry stood and looked around. The Weyr was settling in again. He could see the riders of Wing Two working their way through the Weyr, counting dragons and getting names.

"Feynith, assign some of your dragons to keep watch. If the wizards come again..."

"They just appeared, Weyrleader. We would have fled, but the Wing Leader was injured," replied Feynith.

Harry frowned. The wizards used magic to appear in their midst. With the exception of Campbeltown, not a single Weyr was warded. Harry nodded, then he pulled out a small note pad and jotted down a note. This was a magical problem that required a magical solution, but all he knew was that they needed to ward the Weyrs somehow. It was something else he'd have to worry about and something to bring to the attention of the council.

Campbeltown Social Hall, May 6th, later that afternoon...

Hermione walked into the hall and frowned when she noted a number of people turn to look at her with scowls. She knew what was bothering them, but she wasn't sure how to go about fixing it. Harry had returned to the Weyr with the wings, and then went off on his own, while she got bogged down in putting together the information they had collected for Wing three.

"Hermione," called a voice.

She looked over and noted Karen Khan motioning for her to sit at her table.

Karen smiled at the brunette and waited for her to sit. "Hermione, I don't need to tell you that many people aren't very happy with you."

"No, you don't, but they don't understand."

"No, you don't understand," Karen said, overriding her. "You still think you're dealing with the same Harry you went to school with. He was the boy who let you nag him about studying and doing his homework. He was the boy who let you badger him about following the rules."

Karen leaned a little closer. "But that Harry no longer exists. Or rather, I should say that he only exists under certain circumstances. What you did today was a deliberate attempt to undermine the Weyrleader's authority in front of people we can rightly consider our enemy. And he smacked you down for it."

Hermione stared at the petite girl for a moment, trying to think of a rebuttal, but she couldn't come up with one.

"Harry is one of the most easy going people I know," May said softly, as she joined the pair at the table. She moved over a bit as several other girls also sat down "We deal with him every day and forget that he has two faces he shows to the world. The one we see the most is relaxed Harry, sometimes shy around us, soft spoken, generally a nice guy. The other we see when he is acting in his role as spokesperson for every dragon on the planet. Hard as nails, cold and impersonal, implacable and unwilling to give an inch if it means harm to us or the dragons.

"We saw Harry the Weyrleader when he smacked down Chapman. We saw him again when he met with the Queen. And we saw him today when he struck that wizard and when he told you to shut up," May finished.

Hermione huffed and crossed her arms. "And your point is?" she asked.

Susan Bones sighed. "Merlin, Hermione, you can be really stupid sometimes. You've been on a few dates with Harry, but you're not

exactly going steady with him. Today you tried to pull your usual routine of trying to control him like you've always done and he smacked you down for it. To be honest, I'm really surprised that he didn't come back here and put you onto fence painting detail, or maybe herder or shoveling the stalls in the infirmary."

Hermione winced. Harry's idea of punishing riders who'd done something wrong involved nasty jobs. Few liked taking care of the herds of sheep, and no one wanted to be on fence detail. The Weyr currently had four and a half miles of chain link fencing around it. It didn't need to be painted and that's what made the chore so tedious. Harry usually set someone to paint two hundred yards of fencing, both sides and magic wasn't allowed. It was messy and tiring work, but usually it proved the point to the person being punished.

Hermione shook her head, it was finally hitting home. "He's like a monarch of old," she murmured.

"That's right," May agreed. "He is like a monarch when he speaks for the Weyr or the dragons. I didn't like seeing him strike that wizard, but by the same token, I knew he had to act from a position of strength. And you tried to undermine that position in front of our enemies."

Hermione's jaw set and she nodded reluctantly.

"One other thing you need to realize, Hermione, and you better do it soon or you can forget about any future dates with Harry. He is not the Harry you once knew. He'll let you nag him about studying and doing his homework, but there are lines you cannot cross without invoking the wrath of the Weyrleader. Perhaps someday you may earn the right to cross those lines, but I think it should be obvious from today that you haven't earned that right yet," Susan added.

She stood and smiled weakly at the assembled girls. "I think I should speak to Harry," she murmured, then she turned and left them sitting there.

"Will she learn from this?" asked Karen.

Susan shrugged. "If she doesn't, she's going to discover how much competition she has for Harry. We all agreed to let her have a shot at him, but she isn't going to hold onto him this way. She's a very

controlling person but Harry won't accept that anymore. He'll accept a partner, but never a girl with a domineering personality."

May nodded thoughtfully. "I don't know. We've talked several times about what the dragons will do to us. I think that when the time comes, it's going to be a very interesting season. And the race for Harry is by no means over with girls."

Campbeltown Weyr, Harry's Quarters, May 6th...

It wasn't until later that evening that Harry returned to the Weyr. No one knew where he had gone off to after the Weyr had returned from Irtysh River.

He sat at his desk, rapidly writing in a small notebook. It was his list of things to do and he had been keeping the list since he first arrived at Disko Island with five hundred and three dragons and a house elf turned kleptomaniac.

The knock on his door made him sigh and he put down his pen. "It's open, Hermione," he called.

She entered, looking a little perplexed by the fact that he knew who was at the door. Chekiath could have told him, but to be honest, he knew it was her. He'd expected she would show up the moment he returned from Disko, where he'd spent the afternoon.

He turned to watch her and she stepped forward a bit hesitantly. It was a pose that struck him as very uncharacteristic for her.

"Harry," she said haltingly, "I'm afraid I owe you an apology. I shouldn't have said anything. I should have waited until we were alone to talk to you about it."

She looked up from staring at the floor and he was surprised that her eyes were glistening with tears. "It's been pointed out to me that you've grown considerably, while I continued to try to treat you like I always have. I had no right to interfere when you were dealing with that wizard and I'm sorry I did."

He leaned forward on his chair and massaged his temples. "I can't tell you how hard this has been for me. I don't like being the Weyrleader and no one, not even the riders, know what it's like to

have every dragon on the planet to look out for. You riders are part of my family now and I need to know that when I am dealing with outsiders, I can count on your support.

"Your actions today were minor, but still leaves me doubting you."

"I know," she whispered. "Even Comaloth was unhappy with me. I was shocked when I saw you strike that wizard. It shocked me and I reacted badly."

He nodded and stood, then walked over to her. He reached out with one hand and took her hand in his own. "So where does that leave things?" he asked.

She looked down at their hands for a moment and smiled wanly. "It means I have to learn to do better. I have to learn to trust my Weyrleader and be ready to back him up. But it also means that later, when no one else is around, I may ask him to explain himself to me."

Harry smirked at her and she blinked in surprise. She hadn't noticed before, but he had a definite five o'clock shadow and it made him look several years older. "I'll live with that," he countered. "I have never known you to decide to learn something and fail. But I must warn you; you won't always like the explanations."

She nodded. "I can see that happening and it's something I'll need to learn to deal with. I have no right to question your actions as Weyrleader."

"No, that wasn't what I meant, Hermione. It's all right to question later, or even before. I don't want mindless obedience. But when I'm dealing with people who aren't riders, like today, I need your support, not interference."

She nodded in understanding and Harry smiled at her, then pulled her into a light hug. She wrapped her arms around him and laid her head against his shoulder. She had been so afraid of his reaction to today's events and he had greatly surprised her by acting in a very adult manner to her apology.

"Harry," she whispered.

"Yes?"

"Where did you go today? After we came back from Irtys River, you vanished until after dinner. I asked Comaloth but she said you didn't want to be disturbed."

He shrugged. "I went to Disko. Dobby keeps my weyr there in good shape, even when I'm not using it, and the solitude and peace gave me an opportunity to relax and think things through. I'm not proud of what I did today, Hermione. I needed some time to settle my anger. Had I stayed in the Weyr there's a very good chance you'd be painting the fence tomorrow."

She chuckled weakly and gave him a smile. "This is a prime example of what I was told, but didn't want to see. You are growing so strong," she whispered. "I wanted you to stay like the Harry I knew because he was safe."

"That Harry vanished when I stepped from the tent and entered the arena to face Momnarth," he replied quietly. That period in his life still troubled him.

She drew back slightly and reached out to caress his cheek. She knew how much that time bothered him and she knew he didn't like talking about it.

"He did vanish, but I still get hints of him here and there. In the meantime, you've become so sure and so strong that I wonder if there is room for me anymore," she countered.

He grinned at her. "There's room, but only you can decide what role you want to fill. The role you once had doesn't work anymore. You say I'm growing strong and maybe I am. But how are you growing? That is what I think you should be asking yourself. We can't stay children forever. Even without our dragons we would have grown up."

She nodded. "That's another change. You were never this perceptive before."

He shrugged, unsure exactly how to answer her. He released her, stepped back and removed his glasses. Sighing, he wiped his face tiredly. "It can't be helped, I reckon. All I can do is try to be the best I

can for Chekiath and the others and hope I'm good enough," he replied.

"You're my rider, Harry," Chekiath said from his sand bed, "And you're the Weyrleader. I know you're going to be better than good enough. All of the riders admire you."

Harry shot Cheki a grinned. "Most of them perhaps, but I'm not so sure about Chapman."

Cheki rumbled in laughter. "Kirteth approves of you and he knows how strong you are. That is why he holds back his rider."

Harry nodded and looked over to Hermione, who watched their exchange with a smile. "I never thought I'd have my own cheering section."

Office of the Minister for Magic, May 7th...

Cornelius Fudge sipped at his tea and considered the changes over the past few days. Several prominent Wizengamot families had been taken into custody, but others were still barricaded behind their wards and proving to be most difficult to extract.

He tossed the Prophet aside and glanced over at the report from the Department of International Cooperation. The department was the closest thing the Ministry had to a spy organization and they really did no more spying than what could be read in the publications from other countries.

One thing was patently clear. The international scene was deteriorating quickly. He hadn't considered the international repercussions of announcing the WDF, but the British Ministry was now being copied by nearly every country on the continent. Tensions were rising and Italy and Greece had already managed one small scale battle, with nearly fifty dead on both sides. It was a stalemate and now Italy was also warily watching Spain, which was quietly putting together a large force of its own.

Gringotts had devalued the galleon again. It was now worth only one British pound. When the Ministry tried to protest the value change, the goblins had informed the Ministry representative that only Gringotts could set the value, not the Ministry.

That little tidbit really pissed off Cornelius, but thanks to a screw up, he was forced into dealing with the Wizengamot first. And now, to add to the confusing mix of reports, Dawlish informed him that Alejandro Croaker had been spotted entering a muggle government building.

The only real ray of hope in this whole mess was their recruitment efforts for the WDF were paying off. They now had more than seven hundred members on the force and more were projected to join as more businesses finally folded up, thanks to a lack of dragon products.

He was slowly weeding out the opposition in the Wizengamot. Soon, the only people left in that group would support him without question and he was deep into plans for appointing new members who came from either his own family or people who owed him favors.

He glanced down at his desk and spotted a parchment notice from the Muggle Liaison office. He grimaced and picked it up to give it a brief look over. The memo detailed the receipt of a number of documents from the muggle government, then went on to admit they had no real idea what those documents said. He scowled at the memo and tossed it on the floor. A second later an elf appeared and he banished the offending document.

"Stupid muggles," he muttered. "A waste of my time."

He tapped a crystal on his desk and Percy Weasley stuck his head into the office. "Sir?"

"Tell Delores I want to see her after lunch, then send my secretary in to take some dictation," he snapped.

"Yes, sir," Percy said, then he vanished again.

"I need to light a fire under Delores. We need to finish with this Wizengamot problem," he muttered.

Campbeltown Weyr, May 7th...

Harry walked into the kitchen hall and noted everyone sitting around enjoying their breakfast. He spotted Sirius sitting with Katherine and

James and went over to sit with them after grabbing some coffee for himself.

Hermione tracked his movement with an unhappy expression.

Katherine looked up and smiled when he sat down. "Good morning, Harry," she said.

"I stopped in the infirmary this morning to see Draco. Other than being uncomfortable, he's pretty much fine, but the situation got me thinking," Harry said softly. He leaned closer to the others who turned their full attention to him. "We were really lucky yesterday. Draco took a hit from a weakly powered wizard. If it had been someone like Sirius, or even Hermione, they would have cut him in two."

"What can we do about it?" asked James.

Harry leaned back on his chair, then he spotted Hermione looking unhappy and he frowned.

"Comaloth, would you ask Hermione to join me please?" he sent. He hadn't meant to exclude her and didn't want her to think that he was cutting her off.

"Of course, Weyrleader," Comaloth replied.

Hermione paused in reaching for her cup of tea when suddenly she smiled broadly. Then she picked up her tray and her tea and walked over to where Harry was sitting.

"I'm not sure, James, but we have a dentist in the Weyr, so why can't we get someone more capable to set up our infirmary?" Harry replied, then he glanced apologetically at Katherine. "No offense, Captain, your Corporal Stone is a good medic, but if Albus hadn't known that healing spell, we would have brought back a badly bleeding rider yesterday. The only recourse would have been to send him to a hospital."

"But Madam Pomfrey," Sirius began.

"Is quite an excellent healer and if any of our wizard riders wish, I'll help them learn to be healers. But that doesn't solve our problem

today. And unfortunately there are diseases which normals get that we don't and we're more likely to see injuries that a doctor or a healer could treat," Harry said, cutting Sirius off. "We also agreed to limit bringing her here because it endangers her."

Harry turned when Hermione placed a hand on his arm. "Harry, my dad is acting as dentist. Is it possible that one of our riders might have someone we could ask to help us? Wouldn't that help with security?"

He smiled broadly at her, then turned back to Katherine and James with an inquisitive look.

The pair looked at each other.

"I don't know but I suppose it's possible. I'll ask around, Harry," James replied.

Harry nodded his thanks, then pulled out his notebook and drew a line through an entry. Hermione glanced over his shoulder and grimaced, seeing he was numbering his action points and he was quickly approaching four hundred. His "to do" list was enormous!

"I hope you're planning on having more than coffee this morning for breakfast," Katherine said.

Harry shrugged. "It gets me by."

"You can't live on that," Hermione said with a frown. "Let me get you something to eat."

He looked at her in surprise, but nodded. A few moment later she plunked down a tray in front of him that contained a lighter than usual breakfast for him, except for one thing. Her roll, which she picked up with a smile. He grinned and started eating.

"Captain, you have files on all of the riders and their families, don't you?" asked James.

She nodded. "We put together files when you told us about them the first time."

"I'll swing by later then and we'll go through them. If that doesn't work out, we'll think of something else," he said.

Harry turned to Hermione. "Tell the others that we'll have a down day today. I want the Wings to stay home, so we'll just hold regular classes. We'll pick up with the census when Draco's released from the infirmary."

She nodded and Harry turned back to his breakfast, pausing only to jot down something in his notebook.

Wing leader's Meeting, Campbeltown Weyr, May 11th...

The Weyr settled into an uneasy routine for several days as everyone came to realize that Harry had been right about the need to learn to use the new weapons. While there were no formal Weyr training exercises, riders filled the firing range so much that Sergeant Nichols had to post formal hours for the range. He didn't want anyone there when he wasn't around to observe and he had only so many hours in a day.

Harry glanced up from the conference table when the door opened and he waved them into the room. He watched Draco sit down a bit slower than usual. "All right there, Draco?"

Draco nodded. "It twinges a bit still but I'll be fine, Harry. Thanks for asking."

Harry nodded with a smile. "I've been thinking about what happened; what went wrong and what went right. Through no fault of anyone, Wing three got caught by surprise. A rider was injured and pinned down. After that, things were a complete mess until the Weyr arrived. We had a full Wing and Weyr involved in trying to protect the downed rider and avoid the spells from the wizards."

He took a deep breath and looked at the Wing Leaders and their seconds. "In short, we got lucky. It's a miracle someone wasn't killed."

"I thought the same thing," Martin Benson agreed. "It didn't help that Wing three was unarmed except for their wizards."

Harry nodded grimly. "Yes, I thought about that also, Marty. We've trained with our bows, but we haven't done nearly enough practicing of in-flight shooting. Our performance was acceptable for that situation, but we need to do better. But more to the point, we need to coordinate better."

"In-flight shooting is just more practice," Hermione murmured. "Coordination is the hard part."

"It is a problem. Only two people that I know of have used their dragons to speak to me. Everyone else is relying on talking to get their messages across. Wing leaders need to work with their riders to get them used to talking to them via his or her dragon. And the leaders need to work with their own dragons to get used to using their links to command."

"Short range jumping too," muttered Ronan.

Harry turned to him. "I'm sorry?"

Ronan placed his fingers against his temple. "It's a visualization problem, I think. We arrived and flew straight until we were south of the wizards before turning around and jumping to the point we wanted to be. Why didn't we just jump to that point directly? If we had given the dragons the right visualization, we would have been oriented in the right direction."

"You were awful high up when you arrived," pointed out Michelle.

"True, but a pair of binoculars would have cut that distance by a lot, and I'll bet there's a spell Harry could have used to the same effect," Ronan countered. "It might even be possible to point to the location and let the dragons take a visual look. They have better eyesight than we do."

Harry blinked and turned to look at Hermione and Draco. Both of them shrugged.

"I'll ask Albus if he knows of a spell, Harry, but binoculars should probably be part of our standard kit. I'll talk to Susan and Mariah about it," Hermione offered.

Harry nodded. Susan and Mariah had been compiling a list of material needed by each rider. They were putting together a standard kit that would be given to each new rider as well as the existing riders.

"Do that," Harry said to Hermione, then he looked at the others. "I don't want to get distracted here, but short range jumping with an intent to change orientation may be a good idea."

The others nodded, but Ronan looked unsatisfied.

"Ronan?" Harry called.

He shook his head. "I'm sorry, I was just wondering why Wing three didn't have anyone still in the air to spot the wizards coming in?"

Michelle looked up. "We'd finished our aerial survey. Everyone was participating with the census to get it done quicker," she said with a touch of anger.

When Harry held up a hand and she leaned back on her chair and took a deep breath, knowing he didn't want the discussion to degenerate into a blame session.

"So, everyone was on the ground when the wizards arrived, and mind you, they portkeyed nearly on top of Draco and Michelle. Even an airborne patrol wouldn't have seen them until they arrived," Harry said soothingly. "But Ronan has a point. From here on, Wings need to maintain a patrol overhead I think. Two dragons ought to be sufficient.

"An air patrol would have given you another degree of freedom in your defense," added Marty.

Harry looked at each of the leaders and they nodded in agreement. From hereon they would always mount an air patrol when on Wing operations.

"One other change I want to make," Harry said slowly. It was the one idea he was worried the most about.

Everyone turned to look at him.

"From here on, if a Wing goes out as a group on Weyr business, I want every rider carrying their bow. I've talked with Momnarth, Chekiath and Spath about making some sort of saddle bag we can stow everything in, but until we have that, we'll go with the over the shoulder holsters and bolt boxes in our pockets. I have bandoliers on order for the bolts, but they haven't arrived yet."

Hermione looked unhappy, but both Draco and Michelle nodded in agreement. It had been their Wing that was caught unarmed and they never wanted to be in that situation again.

"No argument from me, Harry," Draco said finally. "I keep seeing that curse heading for us and I knew we had nothing but dragon fire to protect ourselves."

Martin Benson nodded and Ronan gave him a quick smile.

Harry nodded, understanding Draco's fear. He then turned to Hermione. "Problem?"

She chuckled slightly and shook her head. "No, not really. I was about to complain about going out armed when I realized I'm walking around with a far deadlier weapon nearly every minute of the day. And I know for a fact that I could easily cast a killing curse if I had to protect my dragon."

She shivered slightly and crossed her arms. "It would be silly for me to complain when you've gone through so much effort to make those bows non-lethal. If they could do the same with our wands we wouldn't have half the problems we have today."

"It's a nice idea, but I don't think you'd convince the rest of the wizards to limit their wands like that," Draco offered with a weak grin.

Hermione nodded and looked over at Harry. "No problems from me. I'm not going to quibble over bows while I carry a wand. May might, though."

He nodded, then he stood and walked over to a window. Outside he could see some dragons moving around, and in the distance one of the patrol vehicles used by the security force. He turned around to face his wing leaders and he ruefully shook his head. "I had thought life would be easier. All we had to do was get the normals involved

and we'd push the British Ministry of Magic out of our way with their help, but it's not going to be that way."

"Harry?" Draco said in alarm.

He grinned. "We're not a military force and I pray we never will be, but until we can fly the skies without fear from wizards or normals, we must be cautious and work to secure the lives of our dragons and the lives of all the riders to come."

"We're with you all the way, Harry," Ronan replied almost reverently.

Harry glanced at him and nodded, then he saw the others agreeing. It wasn't a perfect solution, but the Weyr would step up their training in fighting. He realized they were writing the one book of lore that Sidraneth hadn't brought with her; how to build Weyrs on a planet that had never had them before.

General Electric Corporate Office, Schenectady New York, USA,
May 14th...

Clinton Dewolf was a mid level executive in contracts who managed to successfully juggle a wife, two children and a career without falling prey to the usual pitfalls of drink or other women. In fact, if asked, Clinton had no known vices.

He doted on his wife and attended his sons ball games every chance he could. He also made friends very easily, both in the tight knit community of company employees and around the world as he traveled for the company. He often corresponded with people he had met on business.

He had been earmarked by many, including members of the company, as one who would go far. Perhaps not to the top of the ladder, but he'd make upper management soon.

Unlike others in his position, he never worked on military projects and none of his projects were even considered company confidential. So when he was handed a rush contract by the British Government to build a five megawatt nuclear test station without a reactor core, he didn't think twice about bragging about it to co-workers and friends. It was just an oddity that they saw several times a year and something to chat about with co-workers over the water cooler.

He didn't care. The Christmas bonus he'd get for bringing in this multimillion dollar contract would pay for a very nice vacation for Doris and himself, maybe even a second honeymoon.

It was a minor piece of information which circulated around the company for more than a week before it was picked up on by a man posing as a Russian exchange student working as an intern for the company. He would pass it along in a letter to his family, which in turn would be read by the GRU, the Russian Intelligence Agency and duly noted.

No action would be taken, since the project wasn't military in nature. It was just one of thousands of pieces of information collected every day. Perhaps someday it would become clear, but it was just a puzzle for a handful of GRU analysts to chuckle over while standing around their version of the water cooler.

Confirmation of the strange order would come via email to one of Clinton's friends in Saudi Arabia when he bragged about the strange contract and his hopes that his Christmas bonus would help pay for a week stay in Majorca. The friend, a mid level government worker, thought it was strange of the British to order such an installation and he mentioned it to a friend in the Ministry of Petroleum and Mineral Resources, who in turn found it strange enough to open a file on the item. The Ministry found it odd that someone would build a power station without a power source.

Despite the best efforts of the British Government to keep dragons and the SDTS secret, it was leaving a trail of bread crumbs.

Tuscany Townhouse, London, May 15th...

Not as old as some of the ancient houses, nor as revered as the noble houses, the Tuscany were a new family who'd managed to parley their extensive muggle shipping contracts into a respected wealth and power in the magical world in the mid 17th century.

They were a cross over family, one that started in the muggle world. When the sole heir to the family moved into the wizarding world, he brought the family's financial might with him. Since then, they'd prospered, mainly by maintaining a neutral stance and being open to

the business opportunities that developed during the various clashes between the light and dark elements of the Wizarding world.

For the first time in three centuries, the family was threatened, and this time it was from a source they were ill equipped to fight. The Ministry had appeared in force two days earlier and surrounded the town house.

John Dieter Tuscany was the family head and still a robust man, barely over one hundred years old. He was not about to give up without a fight. When things started looking bad, he'd made arrangements, calling in the family and activating the wards on the building. They weren't ancient wards, but they were the best wards money could buy, anchored deep in the bedrock with runes carved from the finest Spanish silver.

Unlike the older manor houses, this house was warded by goblins, who used a mix of defensive and offensive wards, making it much harder to break through. Attempting to drain some of these wards actually resulted in magical backlashes that burned out magical cores.

He had already sent his wife out via a secret passage to a chamber half a block away. It was a bolt hole his ancestor had installed a century ago and it was outside the wards, his and the ones thrown up by the Ministry. It was also a secret known only to family members.

Emily had led the grandchildren to the hole and waited there. With a single wave of her wand, she could activate a portkey that would take everyone in the chamber to their Swiss chalet. Now she sat and worried, surrounded by her grandchildren and their frightened mothers. Every woman in the bunch knew her husband was up in the town house, waiting for the moment when the wards finally failed and the Ministry swarmed in.

She wouldn't have long to wait.

The block on which the house stood was part of a wealthy neighborhood. Most homes on the block were occupied by people who were at the pinnacle of their careers and only a few still had children to worry about. While the block wasn't very active, the street was a busy one, adding to the complications for the WDF. The anti-

muggle charms they had put in place were forcing muggles to speed past the block in their vehicles.

The heavy anti-muggle charms laced the area and in front of the house a group of men stood, draining the wards. The ward breakers had gained a lot of experience in recent days and were growing in confidence. They were adequately shielded from the occasional curse that lanced out from one of the upper floor windows.

They hadn't lost a single wizard since their experience with the Flints and they were sure that they would not lose anyone this time.

"The wards are about down, Dad," John Jr. said softly.

John eyed the people out in front from his window and nodded. "Yes, very well, give the signal. We'll meet up at the tunnel entrance and head to the chamber."

He turned and met the eye of his oldest son. "I am so sorry, John," he said softly. "This was all supposed to be yours someday."

His son grimaced. "As long as we get out alive, I'll be happy to rebuild somewhere else."

John smiled grimly. Without realizing it, his son had echoed the family motto of "Never falter".

Three minutes later, John counted the men as they entered the tunnel. Once he was sure of his count, he activated a offensive ward tied to the front door of the house, then he summoned his family elves.

"Nicki," he said to the head elf, "we're fleeing. Bring yourself and all the other elves and their families to the chalet. You must hurry. You have less than five minutes to leave the house."

Nicki looked up at the kindly master. The family had always treated their elves kindly and he was no exception. "Yes, master," he said, his huge eyes filling with tears. Most wizarding families would have simply left their elves behind.

John nodded and hurried into the tunnel.

Nicki carefully sealed the entrance behind his master, then he snapped his fingers and vanished.

The Tuscany family disappeared a few moments later, having escaped the Ministry clutches. Meanwhile, the WDF members had reached the front door and inadvertently triggered John's ward.

The townhouse exploded with a force equal to several tons of TNT. It leveled the block, killing many of the Ministry personnel, including their ward breakers. It also killed or injured more than a hundred normal people, including a school bus full of children.

It would be several days before anyone outside of the Ministry of Magic realized that the explosion hadn't been caused by a ruptured gas main. And the Tuscany family, once they learned of the extent of the explosion, were horrified by the deaths of their muggle neighbors. The house had been built and warded long before the other houses in the neighborhood, and no one had thought much about the old wards erected two centuries earlier and the possible repercussions of their activation.

Harry's Office, Campbeltown Weyr, May 19th...

Harry stood over the printer that had been installed in his office. He had played with it for a bit and had learned how to use it for simple things. Ronan had even shown Harry how to look up things on the internet. As a result, Chekiath's space was now dotted with fantasy dragon art he had printed from various websites.

Much to his mortification, Chekiath had pointed out that he had printed out dragon pictures that usually included scantily clad blondes and brunettes. His only defense was to claim that Cheki picked the pictures to print. Both Harry and Ceci knew that wasn't entirely true.

A knock at the door cause him to glance up. "Come in," he called.

Remus and Sirius stood in the doorway and watched as Harry pulled the single sheet of paper from the printer, then he walked over to his desk and signed it with a flourish.

"What are you doing, Harry?"

"I'm writing a letter to Ragnok, reminding him of my offer. It's been a while and frankly I'm getting worried," he replied, then he carefully folded the letter and placed it on his desk. "Dobby?" he called.

The little elf appeared and smiled, seeing Harry.

Harry picked up the letter and handed it to Dobby. "Would you deliver this to Ragnok? Please give him my regards, then return home."

"Dobby will!" he replied, then vanished.

Harry turned to the others. "So, what brings you here?"

"I wanted to talk to you about Sir Robert's plans," Remus said as he sat down on a chair in front of Harry's desk.

"And I'm here to listen in and offer my sage advice," Sirius said proudly as he sat down next to Remus.

"Sage?" Chekiath said. "Sounds tasty."

The dragon started to rumble with laughter and Sirius shot him a sour look. He was certain the dragons were waiting to catch him as Padfoot.

Harry chuckled at Sirius' discomfort, then he turned his attention on Remus. "So, what about Sir Robert's plans?"

Remus leaned forward on his seat and pulled out a small pad. "On Monday the first of the construction crews will start work. According to Sir Robert, they're going to be removing the fencing in the northwest corner of the Weyr and pushing it inwards by a couple hundred feet. The new replacement fence will be twenty feet high and should block the view of the Weyr. Sir Robert thinks it might not be a bad idea to replace it all with this new fencing, but that's a topic for another time. Once the fence is in place, they'll break ground on a new building to house the test station."

Harry nodded and made a note on his own pad. "I'll speak with the dragons and remind them that they need to remain unseen. And while your here, Sirius, I'd like you to get together with Norendrath

and start putting at least one rider with the Weyr patrol. We'll add more as we bring in new riders."

Sirius nodded. "I'll get on it today."

"Sir Robert also has a question and frankly I don't know the answer to it," Remus said.

Harry looked up from crossing out an item in his list about the patrol. "Oh?"

"Can dragons read?"

Harry blinked and leaned back in his chair, surprised by the question.

"Of course we can read," Chekiath said from his stall. He lifted his head and looked at the three of them, his eyes twirled with streaks of green. "Harry taught me to read, and while he does read some very dull things, occasionally he reads a very interesting book. That book on all the ways to cook dogs was very amusing. I don't understand why one would cook a dog, though. They are bite size, you know."

Harry ignored Remus' laughter and Sirius' sputtering. "I taught you to read?" he exclaimed.

Cheki rumbled and his large head dipped in acknowledgment. "We're bonded, Harry. What you know, I can learn from you. Every time you picked up a book, I learned more. I've seen enough words now to know I can read them."

Harry mulled over that for a moment. "It makes sense, I suppose."

Remus nodded. "Yes, and it will make things easier, I think."

"Just what is the problem, Remus?" asked Harry.

"During the conversation that Albus and Sir Robert had with the Queen, they discussed how difficult it will be to convince a television audience of the dragon's intelligence. Sir Robert was asking about reading because if a dragon can read, then they can use a letter board to spell out replies to queries."

Harry leaned back and considered that problem. "This is all predicated on when we finally release news of the dragons to the world?"

Remus nodded.

Harry stood and walked over to his bookshelf and pulled down the almanac that Emma had given him. He fumbled through it for a few minutes, then he tossed it aside. "Damn. All right then, if the dragons can read, then maybe we can set up some way for them to respond into a computer so the message can be seen by many people. But I think it would be even better if we had an idea of how many people the dragons could talk to at one time." He turned to face his dragon. "Cheki, do you have any idea?" he asked.

The large dragon's eyes tinged with yellow and whirled slowly. "I don't know," he said hesitantly. He didn't like not being able to help his rider.

Sirius shrugged. "It's got to be at least as many as we have here. We've held several meetings, which included all of the riders and a good number of non-riders, in Hangar Two. We've had no problem hearing the dragons."

Harry nodded. "Yes, I can buy that."

"What are you thinking, Harry?"

He shrugged. "I just thought that if we needed to, we could send a dragon representative to a government to speak to their versions of the Wizengamot. Like sending Spath to talk to Parliament."

Remus made a note on his pad. "I'll speak to Sir Robert about it."

He paused when a knock came at the door.

Harry turned and gave Remus an apologetic glance. "Come in," he called.

Dumbledore walked in looking very unhappy. He was as pale as his beard and clearly very upset about something. "I have grave news," he muttered.

Sirius bounced out of his chair and steered Dumbledore over to it. "Sit, Albus. Rest a moment," he said.

"Dobby," Harry said.

The little elf appeared and looked at Harry. "Fetch some tea, please, for the Headmaster.."

Dobby nodded and vanished, then reappeared a moment later with a hot cup of tea. He handed it to the old man, who gave him a weak smile in thanks.

Albus drank his tea and closed his eyes for a moment while everyone waited anxiously.

"Minerva sent me a clipping from the Prophet explaining that the Tuscany family have been declared outlaws. They joined the ranks of the MacMillans, Flints and Abbott families that the Ministry's WDF were attacking. But then, I remembered visiting their home in London some forty years ago for a ball. It was a marvelous affair and they had these wonderful chocolate mints in the shape of a Christmas tree."

Albus leaned back and smiled in remembrance.

"And?" pressed Remus.

Harry and Sirius exchanged a look. Leave it to Dumbledore to remember the sweets from an event held forty years ago.

"Do you recall James talking about that gas explosion in London a few days ago and the tragic deaths of so many people?" Dumbledore asked in a pained voice.

"Yes, it was a terrible accident," Harry murmured. He had watched the news reports on it. The fire alone raged for hours before it was controlled. It was only afterward that they started to realize the scope of the disaster.

"It was no accident," Albus said. "The Tuscany house was on that block. Fawkes took me there a little while ago and there was magic residue on everything. There were Ministry people all over the place, reinforcing the gas explosion idea. Minerva also said that there were

rumors that the Tuscanys were responsible for killing over fifty members of the WDF, including their elite ward breaking team."

Harry looked up sharply. "You weren't spotted by anyone from the Ministry, were you?"

Albus seemed surprised and he shook his head. "No, I was able to keep out of sight easily enough."

Harry nodded, his expression relieved. "It was important that you discovered the Ministry's involvement, but by the same token, you took a big risk, Albus. We really can't afford to lose you now. Next time you need to go somewhere like today, talk to Momnarth or Norendrath so we can keep an eye open for trouble," he said quietly. He stood and reached for his flight jacket. "James needs to know, but he isn't in the Weyr today, so I'll pop over to Arran and pick him up."

Remus nodded grimly, while Chekiath stood and walked over to the pressure switch that lifted the wall. He walked out with Harry close behind him.

As the wall closed, Albus sighed and wiped his face tiredly.

"Are you all right, Albus?" asked Remus.

"No, not really. I'm sitting here marveling at how foolish I was."

"Foolish? You?" Sirius asked in disbelief.

"Foolish," Dumbledore said, peering over his half rim glasses. "In the first war against Voldemort I thought it was an acceptable thing to risk the people I had helping me. Harry is beginning a totally new war, but he believes no one should be risked. He knows there will be losses, but he works to minimize them without even realizing he's doing so. It is a different way of leading than what I practiced, and yet it seems so right now. His riders would follow him anywhere. The loyalty he displays is returned by all of them, and not just the riders."

"I'm not going to say I told you so, Albus," Sirius said softly in reply. "Your problem was you couldn't see beyond your plans. You ignored the relationships of the people helping you and took unnecessary risks. James, Remus, Lily and I had a loyalty to each other that

should have rang alarm bells when you thought I betrayed them. Harry's way might not always be right either, but right now it's what we need."

Remus reached out and pat the old man on the shoulder. "You made some mistakes, Albus, but even Harry would agree that you've worked hard to correct them."

Albus nodded, then he slowly stood. "I'll keep on working to correct them. I suspect it will consume the rest of my life, but when I finally meet Harry's parents again I want to be able to look them in the eye and say 'I tried to fix my mistakes.'. I'll go to James' office. It will be easier to hold this conversation there."

When he turned and walked from the room, Remus and Sirius exchanged a worried look.

"He is trying," Remus said.

"I know," Sirius replied. "But sometimes I get so angry at him for what he did."

Remus shrugged. "He's working on it, Siri. It's all he can do at this point."

"I know," grumbled Sirius. "Lets head over to James' office. I think it's going to be a long and uncomfortable meeting."

Remus nodded and the two exited the office.

One of the principle tenets of the Weyrleader and dragons everywhere was that they were not bound by nationalistic priorities. The Weyrs were an independent entity and not obliged to follow the orders of any national government. This policy was tested on several occasions by various governments, and on more than one occasion, forced a Weyr to relocate to avoid conflict.

Excerpted from The Weyrs of Earth by Remus John Lupin, published 2040.

Author's Notes and Mockeries:

- And now, for something completely different. We are coming down to the end of the first part of this story. Yep, you read right, the FIRST part of the story. In order to maintain our weekly publishing schedule when this part is completed, we'll start busily working on part two and probably not publish anything for a month or two. I want to get at least eight or ten chapters ahead before we start publishing again. We'll do the same process when we get to the end of part two and start part three. Yes, three parts.

- Yah some people dinged me on my comment about making things realistic in a story concerning dragons and magic. (shrug) Its not my fault if they couldn't understand I was referring to the relationships between people and not the dragons and magic. The same goes for those that reviewed trying to fit Between into modern physics. I mean really, folks... remember magic and dragons. If magic were even remotely possible, physicists would have their brains explode.

- Snape, again. I apparently hit a live nerve with my comments about the man. I won't say he's universally hated, but he's greatly disliked in the universe. So now it's a matter of trying to understand why there are so many slash stories where Snape has an illegal and immoral relationship with an underage boy. (Please note that the immorality here refers to the age difference).

- A lot of people are unhappy with Hermione. Hell, she married Ron in canon, what is there to be happy about? But seriously, Hermione is a bright girl who is socially stunted. Do not expect her to grow up overnight that just isn't realistic. Our Hermione has a bumpy road ahead, but seriously, isn't that what growing up is all about?

- Librarywitch, in nearly every story, someone has had the experience of snorting tea/coke/coffee/beer and just about any other liquid through their nostrils, spraying their keyboard/monitor/laptop/spouse/pet. So you're in good company. Enjoy!

- Tutenstein, we'll try to keep the sappy parts to a minimum, but I'm afraid we grew up in an era where stories had some intrigue, some cute and touchy feely stuff, some politics, and then finally we get to the boobs and exploding cars. I'm afraid that if I omitted the other stuff I'd get confused and end up writing about groping cars and exploding boobs.

- A couple of people took exception to the way Major tried to get around the Royal writ, but the simple fact was they are gearing up for a potential conflict. The Queen's writs were for two purposes. It's a clear sign of support for the Weyr and the people there. It was also the right thing to do and she understood that Major would approach their use carefully so as to not tip the government's hand.

- jgkitarel, thank you for seeing what so many have missed. I had thought it was pretty clear. I'd send you a cookie, but if I HAD a cookie, I'd eat it myself!

- Belladonna16 once blew up a Weyr in an Pern RPG by erupting the volcano it was using. I don't want to give away the story, but I will say volcanoes will play an issue here. Fortunately not all Weyrs are in old volcanoes. Nice shooting Bella.

- Shiro-wolfman-k, you are very right. But I'm also ahead of you here. Yes so far they have been exposed to muggles that accepted them, that will not always be the case and while you won't see it in Part one, it will appear later in the series as their exposure to others increases.

- And finally I'll close off these notes with a story recommendation. Anything by Genkaifan, but I am most fond of 'Poison Pen' and 'Quote the Raven nevermore.' (Not to be confused with the Broadway flop of 'Quote the Rabbit'.)

Standard Disclaimer:

Bob walked out onto the stage and stopped in shock.

Alyx walked over to him with a huge smile on her face. "Isn't it wonderful?" she said dreamily.

"What are you doing?" asked Bob.

"There were too many reviews agreeing that Snape was evil. I wanted to change their minds by showing them a more artistic Snape, a kinder and gentler Snape. So I cloned him, and voila! We have two hundred Snapes performing River dance. I programmed them to dance as long as the music played."

Bob sat heavily on the stage and stared at the two hundred Snapes, performing flawlessly. "Well he's got talent, but all that means is he's a talented evil git. Genghis Khan played a Nose harp, but you don't see me booking him for a disclaimer do you?" he snapped.

Alyx threw up her hands. "There's no pleasing you! Snape, Alan Rickman, they are all the devil incarnate to you aren't they?"

Bob stood and calmly brushed the dust from his pants. "I'm sure Alan Rickman is a nice man for a talented evil git, but that doesn't mean I want to marry him! Frankly he doesn't do a thing for me," Bob stated.

"Argh!" shouted Alyx. "You know what? I can't talk to you when you're like this. I'm going to polish my power tools and when I calm down you better be ready to admit I'm right and you're wrong!"

With that she stormed off the stage. Bob blinked and watched her vanish then he turned to the two hundred Snapes who he knew were locked into dancing. "Let's increase the speed a little," he murmured, then he turned to the music console and increased the speed of the playback by eight hundred percent.

The Snapes grimaced and started to smolder as their feet pounded the floor in a blur.

"Harry, I don't think Bob is going to say the words. How can they start the chapter if Bob won't tell them they don't own Harry Potter or the Dragon Riders of Pern?" asked Chekiath.

"Dunno mate, but watching two hundred Snapes burn is different."

"Smells though," replied Chekiath.

Bob cackled evilly and pushed the playback speed to twelve hundred percent of normal.

A dragon that was marked for culling would be led into a special chamber where the Dragon handlers would use a time honored ballista to put the animal down mercifully. The ballista has been the method of dragon killing since the early Romans and continues to be used even today. This author personally witnessed a culling and I can state that the rumors of it taking a dozen or more shots of the ballista are not true. It only took six shots.

Excerpt from *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find them* by Newt Scamander. Published 1927.

Hangar #2, Campbeltown Weyr, May 20th...

Hermione settled into her place at her desk feeling a bit unsettled. The adults and Harry were very tense this morning at breakfast and she wasn't sure why. Adding to her discomfort was the fact that her relationship with Harry seemed stalled as well. They continued to spend time with each other and went on dates on the weekends, but it seemed like neither of them were willing to move the relationship forward.

The hangar had been modified slightly to accommodate several offices for use by the Wing leaders and their seconds. Hermione promptly co-opted one small cubicle for herself where she worked on all of her wing duties.

She glanced down at the blank duty roster and frowned. She was supposed to be working on the rotation roster for the Weyr patrol, but was drawing a blank. She only had this hour after breakfast to work on Wing matters, then she had to break for magic class, followed by lunch, then regular classes after lunch until five. It was a

tight schedule, and until recently one which she had been thriving under.

She placed the pencil down on her desk and huffed silently.

"What's wrong?" asked Comaloth.

She sighed and ruefully shook her head. As a group, the riders had discovered that they were incapable of hiding things from their dragons. Absently she started playing with the pencil again.

"I'm sorry to worry you, Coma," she said sheepishly. "I guess I'm just unsettled this morning."

"Yes, you're worried about Harry and you're worried about the two of you as mates. I keep telling you that you shouldn't be afraid of him," Comaloth replied.

Hermione smiled weakly. "You know me too well," she sent back.

"Of course I do, you're my rider. I know all your secrets," Comaloth replied with an amused tone.

Hermione glanced in the direction of her Weyr. "I know you do, but it's not polite to mention them."

"Hermione, only you can hear me now," Comaloth gently reminded her. "Besides, you know I want Chekiath. He is a fine looking dragon, so big and strong. Chekiath wants me. I know it, he's told me, and he's told me that the Weyrleader wants you, as well. And maybe May or Luna or Susan. I'm not sure. I do know that Chekiath plans to cover their dragons, too, if he can. I think he will, as he's the biggest dragon in the Weyr."

Hermione's eyes narrowed. "Oh, that boy!" she huffed.

"Boy problems?"

Hermione looked up from her desk to see May leaning against the doorjamb, smiling.

"Let me guess. Comaloth is giving you advice again and telling you something you didn't want to hear?"

"How did you know?" exclaimed Hermione.

May stepped up to her desk and carefully reached down to grab Hermione's wrists. She gently turned them until Hermione could see the pencil she had snapped in half.

"Oh," she said weakly.

"So, what's the problem?" asked May innocently.

Hermione grinned at her. "Like I'm going to tell you? You're the enemy."

"I'll tell you if you want to know," Comaloth said, jumping into the conversation.

"Coma, don't you dare," Hermione said abruptly.

"But she could help you, Hermione. You both want Harry, after all. If you work together, you could overcome any competition, then you could share him. There is more than enough Weyrleader for you both."

Hermione groaned and buried her face in her hands.

May laughed softly and shook her head. "Dragons and their advice. Hermione, I don't need details to know it involves you and Harry. Give yourself a chance. I think this is one of those times when we make the mistake of listening to the telly and the other girls and wonder why we aren't in the kind of relationship we see and hear about. If you're happy with where you are, settle for that until you're ready to change it."

Hermione smiled weakly. "I guess you're right. I was expecting a lot of things that haven't happened yet."

"My mum always said if you want something done, do it yourself. Luna said he would be hard to reach," May offered.

Hermione angrily threw her pencil pieces into the trash. "It's just so frustrating," she complained.

"Imagine how difficult it must be for Harry," May said dryly. "Anyway, I didn't come here to make your problems worse. Sir Robert asked me to fetch you. He has an idea and he wanted to talk to us about it."

Hermione shook her head. "He always has an idea," she murmured. "I thought I was smart, but that man..."

May laughed and grabbed Hermione by the hand. "Come on, he's out in the central hangar area with several other riders."

Hermione followed May out into the main meeting area. The folding chairs which had been originally used to seat the potential riders had been long replaced by standard school desks. The stage was still there, along with the original podium, but two white boards now occupied part of the stage. Modular walls penned in three sides, with the back of the area open to a large space suitable for dragons to use to observe.

The same modular walls had been used to set up a number of classroom like areas along one side of the hangar.

Along one wall in the open central area the photo of Chapman still hung, but someone had captioned it with "Don't let this happen to you!". Next to that photo was a huge map of the world which was dotted with black and white pins. Each black pin designated a Weyr which had been visited, the white were Weyrs still to visit. All told, there were thirty five Weyrs world wide.

The only other holdovers from their first visit to this building was the ever present sound of the large space heater and the overhead halogen lamps.

Sir Robert was perched on a stool on the stage waiting as May, Hermione and the others found seats in the front row of desks. Millicent Bulstrode was also present, along with Martin Benson, Samuel Hinerman and Luna Lovegood. Narcissa sat at the table on the stage, going over some papers and generally keeping an eye on Sir Robert.

She had been keeping her opinions to herself and had even managed to hold a civil conversation with Michelle Smith, much to

Draco's surprise. It was a slow process, but she was finding a place for herself in the Weyr and people were coming to accept her.

Dragons belonging to the riders filled the open area behind the assembled group.

"Good, good, you're all here. Harry suggested I talk to you about a project I have. He told me something astounding yesterday and I'd like to confirm it, if possible," Sir Robert said excitedly. "He says Chekiath can read!"

He stopped and smiled broadly at the riders, waiting for a reaction. He was disappointed.

"He can read? How is that possible?" asked Hermione in disbelief.

"Why can't it be possible? You're very smart and I can learn everything you know." asked Comaloth. Her comment wasn't private. "Chekiath is as smart as his rider and the Weyrleader is a lot smarter than anyone realizes."

Everyone looked a little surprised by Comaloth's pronouncement, but then Sir Robert pulled out a very large magazine. "I wasn't sure how good the eyesight of a dragon is when it comes to small objects, so I took the liberty of buying a magazine with extra large print. These magazines are normally sold to people who are visually impaired, but not blind. Would one of you open it to a page and show it to Comaloth?"

Hermione bounced from her desk and took the magazine. She flipped it open as she walked to the back of the room where the dragons were. Comaloth moved closer, stopping a few feet from Hermione.

After Comaloth read a few paragraphs flawlessly, Hermione turned to Sir Robert with a stunned expression on her face.

"Excellent, excellent!" Sir Robert said. The little man was practically dancing with glee.

"I ask why this is important?" asked May.

Sir Robert stopped capering about and faced May. "The problem was how to prove to a televised audience that a dragon is a thinking creature and not some carefully trained animal, like some Americans have done with monkeys. Discovering that dragons have learned to read means that they also must know how to spell!"

Sir Robert paused and lifted a finger in a dramatic gesture.

"Of course, I can spell. I wouldn't be able to read otherwise, silly little master smith," Trath said. She sounded upset that anyone would find this an unusual thing.

"Trath!" hissed May in dismay.

Sir Robert laughed. The dragons knew that he had a special place in the Weyr but they really had no experience with the term 'scientist'. To solve that, they reached back into their history and decided that Sir Robert must be a Master Smith. He was personally very happy with that appellation. It was far better than the 'Sheep Guy' that Lord Mills earned.

"No, no, my dear, that is quite all right. We really shouldn't be surprised by our dragon friends. If we accept that they are intelligent, and no one can doubt that now, we must also accept that they can do things just like we do. Reading is one of those things, and I wouldn't be surprised to discover they can do math, as well," Sir Robert said to May.

"Math is hard," Olaronth declared. "Marty complains about it all the time, but he still does some challenging problems. I wish he'd do more calculus, though. That's easy."

"I like calculus too," added Tarianth.

Sir Robert stood still for a moment, then he blinked. "Of course!" he muttered. "Their ingrained ability to understand multidimensional navigation! It would mean that dragons are probably capable of easily picking up any field that involves relationships of time, space and motion. Other fields, like Algebra, they would struggle with like any normal student. Astonishing! Simply astonishing!"

"Sir Robert?"

He looked up to see Hermione standing nearby, looking at him.

"I can see how this excites you, but shouldn't we concentrate on the problem of proving intelligence?"

He blinked and nodded vigorously. "Yes, yes. Prioritize! First things first! Now that we have verified the ability, let's think about the next logical step."

He paused and peered at the dragons in the back of the room. "Comaloth, or any other dragon. Please don't be offended, but if I were to produce a large alphabet, could you use it to spell out words?"

Hermione walked over to a desk and pulled out a sheet of paper and a large black marker. A moment later she held up a sheet with an alphabet on it.

Sir Robert smiled. "It's a good idea my dear, but it's far too small..."

Hermione smirked and walked to the back of the room. She sent a silent command to Comaloth to move back, then she placed the sheet on the floor. "Engorgio!" she said, pointing her wand.

Sir Robert laughed. "Marvelous! I keep forgetting about magic and what it can do! Now, Millicent dear, would you act as recorder while we ask the dragons to spell out their replies to a few questions?"

Milli, with her ever-present notebook, stood up and nodded as she walked to the back. "I'm ready, sir," she said.

The group moved to cluster around Millicent and Sir Robert hurried down the steps of the small stage to join them. It was an unusual group and they had an unusual task, to find a way of proving dragons intelligence to the greater community of humanity.

#10 Downing Street, London, May 20th...

Harry tugged at his tie and collar. He sat in the outer office with Lord Mills and Albus Dumbledore. At James' request, he wore a suit that he'd been given shortly after the Weyr started receiving government money, but had never worn.

James would never tell Harry, but May had pestered him about replacing Harry's wardrobe as soon as it was possible. With the help of Dobby, who took Harry's measurements, they replaced many of the old, worn items from the Dursleys with new clothing. He had been careful to insure they didn't overwhelm him with new clothing, but eventually he had enough that Dobby was able to remove and dispose of the old hand-me-downs.

The only differences were the suit and an updated pair of glasses, which James had given Harry, supposedly as a gift. James was surprised by Harry's reaction to the gifts and was glad he hadn't made a big deal about the rest of the clothing he had purchased.

It was Harry's first visit to the Prime Minister's residence and he was exceedingly nervous. He was thankful that James had taught him how to tie the knot in his tie and even more grateful when he showed up early to help Harry tie it this morning. He had totally forgotten how!

The Prime Minister's secretary eyed the three men sitting in the outer office. Lord Mills had become a frequent visitor in recent months, and the strange old man in the leisure suit was nice. He always presented her with a single rose when he arrived. She was certain he was using slight of hand because he never had a visible rose when he walked into the office.

The newest visitor had her puzzled. For one thing she was under strict orders to give him the utmost courtesy, as if he were a visiting Head of State. For another, he was young, probably even a few years younger than her youngest son, and he was just turning twenty. He was also very very nervous about his visit for some reason.

Standing, she poured several cups of tea and placed them on a tray. She knew the Prime Minister was busy and wouldn't be able to see these three for at least another thirty minutes.

"Tea?" she said, offering the tray to the three men. "The Prime Minister will be available shortly, I'm sure. He wanted to wait until Lord Kennewick arrived."

Harry fixed his tea and gave the older woman a weak smile in thanks. He hadn't expected to be asked to come along to this meeting and he felt very out of place.

The secretary sat back at her desk and returned to her typing, while observing the trio. Lord Mills idly flipped through a magazine and Dumbledore appeared to be sleeping, while Harry just looked around and played with the collar of his shirt.

Harry glanced at Dumbledore and gave him a sour look. He knew the man was working on his occlumency shields and not sleeping. Harry was immune to legilimency and unable to practice occlumency, thanks to his dragon bond. The bond would not allow anything to interfere with it, including occlumency.

"Relax, Harry," Dumbledore murmured, then he opened one eye to look at him. "Even if you can't work on shields, just think about centering yourself. Pick one image or feeling and let it fill your thoughts. Take slow easy breaths and consider the image carefully."

Harry nodded and he focused on a spot on the wall. Images of several scantily clad riders flipped through his mind, a memory of that time at the hot springs. As his body reacted to those images, he shook his head in agitation. Meeting the Prime Minister for the first time, he'd have to shake the man's hand, and he couldn't do that if he was trying to cover up a very awkward biological reaction!

He needed something else, and quickly. Changing tracks, he settled on the feeling he got from flying his dragon.

Fifteen minutes later, Dumbledore reached out and touched Harry on his shoulder. When the young man blinked and refocused on him, Dumbledore smiled. "Excellently done, Harry. Such exercises are wonderful for helping when we're unsettled."

"Why weren't we taught to do this?"

For Harry, the fifteen minutes had passed in the blink of an eye and he no longer felt so nervous.

Albus looked pained. "Normally it was taught as part of a wizarding culture course that every student took in first year. I remember learning some new things in that class. But before I came to the

school as a professor, the Board did away with that class. It was one of the first formal moves by the Board of Governors to limit what was taught to muggle born students."

Albus knew he could speak fairly freely, even with the secretary listening. She had been briefed on magic, as had most of the PM's staff. She didn't believe in magic personally, but she was professional enough to do as she was told and nothing that was said in her office was ever repeated.

A buzzer interrupted them and they both turned to see the secretary pick up a phone. She listened for a moment, then she smiled at the three. "The Minister will see you now." she said softly, then she shot Harry an encouraging look.

James walked over to one door and opened it. He held it open, while Albus and Harry entered. Harry nearly plowed into Dumbledore's back when he came to a sudden halt.

"Alejandro?" he exclaimed.

Harry leaned around Dumbledore and was surprised to see a neatly dressed man in a three piece suit who looked nearly as old as Dumbledore.

The man looked up and his eyes lit up in recognition. "Albus, you old scoundrel! I was wondering if I'd run into you sooner or later. And is that the elusive Mr. Potter I see? You've caused quite a stir at the Ministry, boy."

Harry scowled and moved out from behind Dumbledore.

Dumbledore placed a calming hand on Harry's shoulder and felt the young man relax slightly. "Things have changed, Alejandro," Albus said quietly. "I assume you've been helping our friends?"

Croaker shrugged and gave him a bitter look. "I didn't have much choice, did I? The muggles co-opted all of the..."

"Normals, call them normals, or mundanes," Harry said flatly.

Croaker blinked and turned to stare at Harry. "Look, boy..."

Harry stepped up so that he was right in Croaker's face. "You will learn to call them what they are; normal people who happen to outnumber your kind by a thousand to one. And do not ever call me boy."

Croaker, Dumbledore and the hidden wizarding security felt the power building up around Harry.

"What is going on here?" asked Prime Minister Major in a frosty tone.

Harry took a step back and bowed slightly to Major. "My apologies, Mister Prime Minister. This person might be helping you, but he's still harboring a great deal of prejudice against normal people."

"You're a wizard, too!" complained Croaker. He didn't like any mere boy putting him down like that.

"I am a dragon rider," Harry said flatly. "I am no wizard."

"Is there a problem, Harry?" asked Chekiath.

Everyone except Harry, James and Dumbledore started at that. They had gotten used to dragons popping up in their heads.

"No problem, mate. Maintain your position and your cover," Harry replied evenly.

"The dragons are here?" whispered Major. He looked around a bit wild eyed as if he expected them to appear in the room.

Harry nodded. "There are four sitting on nearby rooftops, in case of problems. Chekiath doesn't really like me being too far away. Don't worry, they can't be seen by anyone when they don't want to be."

"And heard? Will the whole building hear that question?" asked James. He knew the answer, but he asked it to reassure the others.

Harry shook his head. "At best, only the Prime Minister's men hiding here in this room and his secretary heard it. Dragons are a bit imprecise in controlling their range. It was centered on me, which included everyone in the room, and perhaps your secretary, who's desk is close to the door. Cheki was trying to limit his range."

Dumbledore arched an eyebrow when Harry revealed the presence of others in the room. With a slight twitch he activated a charm on his glasses causing the two security men to become visible under their cloaks. Later he would ask Harry and learn that Chekiath told him how many people were in the room.

The door opened again and Lord Kennewick walked in. He looked around in surprise, seeing everyone standing tensely. "What's happened?" he asked.

"Nothing, just a minor misunderstanding," Albus said softly. "Might I suggest we all sit down?"

Everyone took a seat and Prime Minister Major looked towards Lord Mills. "It's your show. You called this meeting."

Lord Mills nodded and gestured to Albus.

Dumbledore sat up straight, his expression grim. "Thanks to some information I received from my former deputy, I visited the scene of the recent disaster in London. I'm afraid that the story of it being caused by a gas main explosion is quite wrong. When I visited, I found the scene mobbed with Ministry obliviators and there was a heavy residue of magic in the area, far too heavy for this to be anything but the result of a lot of magic being expended."

Albus paused and leaned forward. "What tipped me off was the location. It was more than forty years ago, but I recall visiting a house on that block that belonged to one of the neutral Wizengamot members."

Croaker made a growling sound in the back of his throat and reached for the Book of Answers. He had stolen the book when he fled the Ministry. "Of course, the Tuscanys," he said softly after paging through the book. "I forgot they were there."

Albus arched an eyebrow when he spotted the book, but he refrained from speaking. There would be time later for him to catch up with his old friend.

"My god," muttered Kennewick, "you mean to say the one hundred dead and two hundred injured are just innocent bystanders in a wizard battle?"

"More precisely, in the war between the Minister and the members of the Wizengamot," corrected Albus. "The Ministry has been arresting a great many of the powerful families of late."

Croaker snorted. "Actually, they seem to be killing more than they are taking people into custody. Thanks to the WDF, a number of the old time noble families have ceased to exist."

Kennewick shook his head and shot a grim glance at his Prime Minister. "John, our options are running out. We really can't afford another attack like this."

Major leaned back in his chair. "How are our forces coming?"

Kennewick frowned. "We still don't have as many wizards as we'd like as troops. The rest of our ground forces are up to their usual standards and we're starting to get some real good intelligence from the Yanks and their keyholes."

"Keyholes?" asked Harry.

Kennewick shot Harry a look then he turned to Major with an unhappy expression. It was clear that he thought including a teen in this discussion was a mistake.

"Cyril, Her Majesty wishes that we treat the Weyrleader like we would any leader of an allied nation. It's all right to give him a description of the keyholes." Major said with a slight smile.

Harry turned to stare incredulously at the Prime Minister. This was the first he had heard about it. Major shrugged. "Her Majesty felt that, given you were at the heart of what could be the most important situation our country has faced since World War II, it was only right to extend you the courtesy."

Harry nodded and swallowed nervously.

Kennewick looked at Major for a moment longer, then he sighed. "A Keyhole satellite is an American spy satellite. It is extremely precise and capable of producing photographs and other information with astounding clarity. Thanks to the Americans, we now have detailed maps and aerial photographs of nearly every magical enclave in the

United Kingdom. It was easy to do, really. We just looked for populated areas that didn't appear on standard maps. A large chunk of occupied space in the middle of London with no recorded address stands out like a sore thumb. We now have detailed maps of all of the hidden areas."

Harry considered that for a moment. "Thank you," he said quietly. He wasn't out to antagonize the man, he just wanted to understand what was being said.

Major nodded and opened a folder. "Her Majesty would like me to tender one final offer for the Minister of Magic and all department heads to resign. In return, she would be willing to grant them amnesty from prosecution. It seems we have an interesting problem facing us. Legally, the Ministry of Magic was not party to any of the reforms which have taken place over the last eight hundred years. As a result, should the Ministry of Magic refuse Her Majesty's offer, she could legally order them taken to the tower and beheaded."

Major looked up with a smile. "Obviously, she's not going to behead anyone, but her power over the Ministry of Magic is absolute. It exists at her will and her will alone. If the offer of amnesty is rejected, she will dissolve the Ministry and then ask that we take steps to bring this separatist element back under Crown control.

"Her Majesty is adamant on this issue, gentlemen. The Ministry must abide by Crown law and use her courts."

"I can add in roughly thirty former aurors," Croaker offered. "They aren't up to hit wizard standards, but they have been trained in dueling."

"You'd have to persuade them to use lethal spells, Alejandro. Most of them have never cast a dangerous spell in their lives," Dumbledore observed.

Croaker nodded, acknowledging the point. "I know, but they are hungry right now. Most haven't found any means of employment. Give them a paycheck and me a couple weeks to work on their spell casting and we'll have a solid group. Only one of my hit wizards is still around and he's become rather erratic of late," Croaker said unhappily.

Harry looked up at that and his eyes narrowed in suspicion. "Tall man, sandy brown hair with a scar running down the left side of his face?"

Croaker turned to Harry, who had just described his coworker's disguise enchantment to a tee. "You know Hawthorne?"

Harry shrugged. "We never did find out his name. He broke into the Weyr and injured one of my people before I put him down. After that, we tried questioning him. We learned he was under some heavy oaths and enchantments, so he was obliviated and dumped far enough away that no one would connect him with us. Besides, he's already been punished, so I didn't have to do anything to him. If you know him, I'd suggest you tell him to update his will."

"What did you do?" demanded Croaker angrily.

"Just who are you, anyway?" countered Harry. "I don't have to answer..."

"Enough," Albus said in a loud voice. "We don't have the luxury of time, nor should be we at odds with each other. I'm sorry, Harry. I should have introduced you. This is Alejandro Croaker, an old friend and former Head of the Ministry's Department of Mysteries. They research dangerous magics and also maintain the hit wizards for the Ministry, or they used to. Alejandro fled the Ministry in much the same manner as I did."

Dumbledore turned to Croaker. "Your man discovered our location right enough, but in order to do so, he performed a forced legilimency on Xenophilius Lovegood. I'm afraid the rumors about the family having lethal protections against mind attacks are very true. Your man was caught at the Weyr, healed of his injuries and sent on his way. We just assumed he worked for the Ministry. We were told that your man has less than a year to live."

Croaker frowned, unhappy to hear that his last remaining hit wizard had been so badly damaged. "Albus, I'm surprised you allowed..." He trailed off seeing Dumbledore rueful expression.

"I'm afraid you're operating under a mistaken impression, old friend. I am a welcome guest at the Weyr. I teach and offer advice to the Weyrleader and others. In return, the Weyr shelters me. But I have

no real authority. What happens there, happens at the will of the Weyrleader and the Weyrleader only."

Croaker looked at Dumbledore sourly and turned back to the Prime Minister, who was watching the exchange with interest. He was clearly unhappy with what he was hearing. John Major decided it was time to get the meeting back on track.

"As interesting as this is, I would prefer if we remain on topic. Lord Kennewick, Mr. Croaker is offering some thirty trained wizards. Can you make use of them?"

"Another thirty wizards would be a welcome addition, but do we have enough time to get them trained?"

Kennewick looked troubled. "Maybe," he replied cautiously, "assuming we don't have another explosion like the one in London. Assuming that holds true, we should be ready to go by the middle of next month."

"I'm surprised you didn't use them to attack the Ministry directly," Albus said to Croaker.

Alejandro grimaced. "With thirty wizards I could assassinate a few key people, but I can't go up against the WDF with only thirty wizards. They have nearly a thousand wizards in that thing now."

Albus grunted in agreement and shook his head ruefully. He marveled at just how badly things had gotten since the beginning of last school year.

Major consulted a sheet in his folder, then he looked up at his guests. "Very well, then. Getting back on track, Weyrleader, we've had a request via the Americans. They would like to know what is entailed in putting together a Weyr somewhere in the United States."

Harry blinked, then he smiled tightly. "If they agree to my conditions, I don't have a problem with it."

Major looked surprised. "Just out of curiosity, what conditions would those be?"

Harry leaned back in his chair. "We were approached by the only group of dragon handlers who didn't cull dragons from their reserve. When it was decided to open that reserve as a real Weyr I decided that all Hot Rock production should be funneled through Campbeltown. We'll act as a clearinghouse for the rock production and make sure each contributing Weyr gets an share equal to what they produce.

"The second condition was easier. The first hatching for any new Weyr must be held our Hatching Weyr so we can oversee the training of the people who will train future riders of their own Weyr."

"The final condition surprised even me. The dragons have told me they will accept that each Weyr needs a human leader who will deal with the local Weyr issues, but they will only accept me as Weyrleader. Local Weyrleaders will be chosen by the senior dragon at the Weyr, after the dragons get to know the riders."

"So, you'll speak for the dragons worldwide?" asked Major.

Harry nodded and managed to look embarrassed. "Probably until someone else comes along who can speak to all dragons."

Major looked confused and he glanced over to Albus for an explanation.

"Harry is the only person that has a bond with all of the dragons. Each rider has a bond with a single dragon. But Harry has the bond with his dragon plus the ability to reach out to every dragon on the planet. So far, no one else has manifested this ability. I have spoken with Spath, the dragon elder, and he feels that Harry is the only person capable of representing dragons. He thinks that one day a son or daughter of Harry's will have the same ability and that person will inherit the title. Or perhaps someday a new rider might come along with the ability. Right now, however, the dragons will allow no one but Harry to speak for them, and they will accept no commands from anyone but him," Albus explained.

Major nodded. "The conditions don't seem unreasonable," he said softly. "But diplomacy has stalled on the strangest of reasons in the past. I will inform the Americans of your conditions and let them know what the requirements for riders are."

Harry nodded. "The Weyr will be looking to build a list of potentials, probably starting around September. Maziang will be supplying roughly forty potentials and I'd like to double that for Campbeltown, but that still remains to be seen. Once we have a big enough list from the UK, we'll help the Americans assemble their own list of potentials. After a year has passed, each Weyr should be capable of finding their own potentials."

Croaker leaned forward and rubbed at his temples. "I guess that means we won't get the dragons back under our control then," he muttered.

Harry shot him an icy glare, but before he could reply the Prime Minister spoke up.

"I'm afraid that isn't the only change you wizards are going to have to learn to live with. Her Majesty's government will not allow the deliberate and willful suppression of any sentient species. I'm quite afraid any new Ministry is going to be bound by Crown law or it will not be tolerated by Her Majesty's government."

"The dragon crisis is driving countries over the edge. We aren't the only ones with problems. Italy and Greece are waging war against each other. So, it's been small scale stuff, but sooner or later they are going to have their own London gas main explosion," Croaker said with a snarl. "Spain is building an army like the one we have here, as are France and Germany. For the first time ever, the Ministries are all building armies!"

"Mister Croaker," the Prime Minister said soothingly, "I understand the problems that are being encountered and we do sympathize. What you fail to realize is that, well to put it in terms you might understand, the genie is out of the bottle and you can't put it back."

"The dragons are an intelligent species. According to the reports I've been seeing, they are as intelligent as humans. And they are led by someone who is willing to do anything to protect them, including killing, if necessary. The simple fact is that you cannot continue to expect to exploit them or any of the other intelligent magical species. The dragons won't stand for it, and neither will her Majesty's government."

Croaker looked around at the stern visages around him and he slumped in his chair, defeated. "I don't know," he muttered.

"Change isn't always a bad thing, old friend," Albus said softly. "We've rested on our laurels for far too long. Now it's time to look to a new future."

Croaker nodded, then he turned to Harry. "Mister Potter, I owe you an apology. As much as I knew things had to change, I was unwilling to accept some of those changes."

Harry nodded curtly, still unwilling to trust the man, but he'd give him a chance to prove himself. "Mr. Croaker, I can understand your feelings. If you'd like, I would be willing to allow you to spend a few days with us. Talk to our dragons, sir. See for yourself that they aren't mindless beasts."

John Major sat behind his desk and nodded in approval. He was impressed with Harry for making the offer. He suddenly had the germ of an idea that he need to talk to some people about. Scribbling a quick note to remind himself, he then looked up and smiled because even he could feel the tension draining from the room.

"Nothing need happen further today but we'll need to meet at least weekly until Lord Kennewick says his people are ready. If everyone agrees, we'll meet again next week."

Everyone nodded and Major leaned back on his chair. "Thank you, gentlemen," he said.

Albus turned to Croaker. "Alejandro, I'll send Fawkes for you later today, if you'd like."

Croaker nodded. "Yes, but I need to speak with some people this morning. I'll be ready by fifteen hundred."

Albus smiled at his friend, then turned to follow the other men from the room.

Gringault City, under London, May 22nd...

Harry paused, holding his fork only an inch from his face. The small elf that had appeared before him looked exceedingly nervous and scared. He wore a single tunic that fell below his knees. On the breast of the tunic was a large embroidered G.

"Yes?" he said, placing the fork back on the plate.

"Lord King Ragnok asked me to deliver this message," the little elf squeaked. Just outside the large window, the elf could see several dragons lounging around.

Dobby appeared with a small pop and he looked at the strange elf with a frown. "Who is you?"

"I is Ipsy," the little elf declared.

"Dobby, wait, he's just here with a message," Harry said, then he turned back to the elf. "Don't be frightened, Ipsy. No dragon would ever hurt you. You are bonded to Gringotts?"

Ipsy shook his head. "No, sir, master sir, Ipsy works for delivery company owned by goblins, not Gringotts, I is a free elf. I can deliver messages to places people want no one to go."

Harry arched an eyebrow. The concept of Goblins owning any other companies had never occurred to him before.

"I wonder what he means?" asked Hermione from over Harry's shoulder. He glanced up and nodded a greeting.

"I suspect the wards on this place hide who's here. I can't believe the Ministry who claims they want to arrest me wouldn't have tried an owl trace, but apparently they didn't. Or when they finally got around to it, the Weyr was unplottable."

"Actually, Harry," Remus said a bit uncomfortably, "when you had Dobby bring us to Disko that first day I cast an owl obscuration charm on you to keep you from being found by any owl other than your own."

Harry looked at Remus who was sitting across the table from him. The man looked very tired and in a bit of pain. Tonight would be a full moon and he undergo the change.

"Oh," Harry said helplessly. "Well, it worked, I guess, if they needed Ipsy here to bring me a message. They could have asked Polenth, but I figure it's still a new idea to them."

He turned back to Ipsy, who held out the message and Harry took it. "Do you need to wait for a reply?"

Ipsy shook his head. "No, sir, Ipsy wasn't told to wait."

Harry nodded absently and Ipsy vanished with a small pop. He opened the message and read for a moment before standing. "Wing Three is out on a census visit?" he asked, looking at Ronan, his second.

Ronan nodded. "Yes. They only have a dozen or so Weyrs left to visit. Draco hoped they could get at least two Weyrs visited before classes this afternoon."

"Very well, assemble Wing One for a trip to Gringault in about a half hour. I'll ask Momnarth, Norendrath and Spath to join us," Harry said quietly.

Ronan looked surprised, but nodded.

"Remus? Will you join us and ask James to come along? Are you up to it?"

"Sure thing, Harry. I'll go find James as soon as I'm done here." Remus replied with a tired smile. When Harry looked dubious, Remus reached out and gripped his shoulder. "I'll be fine as long as we're back before dark."

Harry smiled, then turned and walked from the room, leaving his breakfast unfinished.

Hermione sighed and looked unhappy at being left behind again.

"Coma, love, can you ask Chekiath to pass along a message for me? Tell him I'd like to speak to Harry tonight after dinner, if possible," Hermione sent to her dragon.

There was a moment of silence in her bond, the Comaloth sent back, "Chekiath says Harry's sorry about leaving you behind, but if you still want to talk, his door is always open to you. I don't understand that. Harry never locks his door, so isn't it open to anyone?"

Hermione smiled at her dragon's comment. "It's a human saying, dear heart. It means that he always has time to see me. It really has nothing to do with locking a door."

"Oh! Well, that is nice of the Weyrleader. But doesn't that mean that on those nights when your feeling a bit frisky and a little lonely you could go to Harry? His door is open, remember."

Hermione bit back a groan. She had a whole bevy of euphemisms for the times when she indulged in some self gratification and had been forced to explain them to her dragon. Dragons didn't resort to masturbation but they understood the urges, as well as the idea of doing some things by yourself to keep those urges from becoming overwhelming. It was something every rider had discovered, to their embarrassment. Nothing could be hidden from your dragon.

Outside the Kitchen Hall, Wing One, plus a few extra dragons, lifted skyward and vanished from view.

Harry and the others appeared over the large square outside Ragnok's palace. Unlike before, when alarm bells rang, this time a single horn sounded, followed by a dragon's bellow from below. Polenth had been asked by Ragnok to attend the meeting.

Harry took in the square and smiled at what he saw below him. There were chairs for the humans, and more than enough room for all of the dragons. Off to one side was a pen containing some animals, which he guessed were for any dragon who got hungry. Ragnok was already descending the steps of his palace.

Other than two heavily armed goblins who seemed to be part of Ragnok's personal guard, there was no sign of any armed goblins anywhere.

"You ready, Cheki?" he asked softly.

"I remember what you told me, Harry. I won't let you down."

He thumped the side of Chekiath's neck affectionately. "I know you won't. Now, let's land the Wing."

He gestured and the wing circled the square one final time before coming to a precision landing.

Harry slid down from his spot on Chekiath and pulled off his helm and goggles, placing them in his bottomless pouch. For the first time since the attack on Wing Three, Harry risked taking the wing out unarmed. They still wore the bandoliers that contained fifty color coded bolts, a pair of binoculars and other items, but the bows had been left behind at the Weyr. They were here to talk today, not to make war.

Harry started walking to where Ragnok stood, with Chekiath following right behind him. He stopped a few feet from where Ragnok waited and he bowed slightly.

"Greetings, Lord Holder of the Goblins." Chekiath said, then he and the other dragons dipped their heads in a dragon form of a bow.

"Thank you for inviting us, Lord Ragnok," Harry added.

Ragnok nodded to Chekiath with a look of surprise, then he turned to Harry. "Welcome, Dragon Lord. Please accept the hospitality of our city during your visit."

Ragnok gestured to the seats and Harry smiled, then took a seat. This time the seats were all at the same height. Ragnok sat, then all of the other goblins filled seats facing Harry while the riders sat down as well. James, at Harry's request, had taken the spot to his immediate left.

At some hidden signal, a small table appeared between Harry and Ragnok and a couple of elves placed an elegant silver tea service on the table and served the humans.

"I apologize for taking so long to reply to your offer, Dragon Lord," Ragnok said softly. "But my council was evenly split as far as how to reply."

Harry accepted a cup from an elf with a smile of thanks. "Please, Lord Ragnok, call me Harry. If that seems too familiar, Weyrleader

will suffice. As to your reply, I was grateful that you did reply. Events are starting to accelerate and I was fearful that we would not hear from you before it was too late."

"Weyrleader," Ragnok said, as if testing the word. "It is an strange word."

Harry smiled. "The dragons have memories spanning back many thousands of years. A weyr is where a dragon lives along with his or her rider. As smart as our dragons are, I think they like to use names that remind them of their origins. Hence, Weyrleader, or the title that both you and the Prime Minister of Britain share, Lord Holder. They mean no offense but they are comforted by using familiar terms."

Harry paused and sipped his cup. "Shall we get down to business, Lord Ragnok?"

Ragnok nodded and motioned for Harry to begin.

Harry smiled and he made a minor gesture. "We are prepared to relocate any people who you wish to protect from a wizard assault. Considering the close quarters of your tunnels, our assistance can stem from our evacuating your more vulnerable people, the old, the sick and the very young. Inside the tunnels, only Polenth's people can assist with active dragon fire.

"Lord Mills bears an offer of aid from the muggles, which I urge you to take seriously. Finally, my airborne dragons can provide assistance in assaulting any wizards assembling above ground in Diagon Alley or should the unthinkable happen and the wizards make their way down to Gringault. Regrettably, our airborne dragons are too big to work well inside your tunnels."

Ragnok glanced to the goblins sitting next to him, then he turned back to Harry. "And the price for your assistance is?"

Harry looked embarrassed. "Lord Ragnok, I understand that you and your people place a high value on commerce. So I will understand if this surprises you when I say I am not putting any price on our aid. Dragons help their friends. Both Goblins and the Wizards refused to see dragons as anything other than mindless beasts, suitable for slaughter. When we forced you to reevaluate the situation, you accepted the evidence and made changes to how you do things.

Polenth has spoken highly of the changes you've made and how you're still looking for opportunities which might benefit your people in the changed situation.

"Goblins have done what the Wizards refuse to do. Polenth's clan is now safe and happier than ever. They enjoy working with your people. By helping you and your people, I'm helping Polenth's clan."

Ragnok nodded as if he'd expected that answer. "If you were to relocate our people, where would you take them?"

Harry shrugged. "We can take them anywhere in the world you want us to take them. If you don't have a particular destination in mind, then I'd recommend either to our Weyr, or our Hatching Weyr. I would admit that we're not equipped to handle a lot of people for a long term, but I think we'd make do."

"Her Majesty's government would help with any effort to house and feed a large group needing refuge," James added.

Ragnok glanced at James for a moment, then he turned back to Harry. "What about the dragons? Where would they go?"

"The Weyrleader has created a refuge for us, Lord Goblin," Polenth said from nearby. "I have been there a few times and it's adequate for our needs. There is ample space for goblins, but you prefer living in holds and there are no holds there, just a large chamber."

Harry's frowned slightly. "The place we made for Polenth's clan is on an island off the coast of Greenland called Disko Island. It's near our hatching chamber, but dragons have fewer needs, so it's little more than a big open underground chamber, poorly lit and heated by volcanic activity from beneath."

Ragnok arched one thin eyebrow and he spoke something in Gobbledegook to a nearby Goblin. The goblin nodded and ran off down one of the side streets.

"Would it be possible for one of my people to inspect this area?" asked Ragnok.

Harry looked surprised, then he nodded.

Ragnok reached for his cup. Harry was sure it wasn't tea but he didn't want to risk offending by asking. "I am uncomfortable with such a one sided arrangement, Weyrleader. As you say, we value commerce. It may be that we can assist you in return, thus keeping the ledger balanced."

"Weyrleader, Ronan says he doesn't want to owe us a favor. He thinks that inspecting Disko might lead to the Goblins being able to offer a service in return for what we're offering," Garanoth said privately.

Harry nodded, and his smile broadened. "If you have someone you'd like to inspect the Weyr, we'd be honored to show them."

"I will have sent for one of our Master Tunnelers. Our race have been delving the world since time began. They know no peer," Ragnok said proudly.

Harry spotted the goblin that had left the meeting, only now he was approaching with another goblin, this one dressed in a heavy leather jerkin that was scarred and pitted with burn spots.

The strangely garbed Goblin dropped to his knees near Ragnok. The pair spoke briefly in Gobbledegook, then the goblin stood and looked at Harry expectantly.

"This is Brusk, Master Tunneler. He is in charge of our tunnel efforts and helps maintain our tunnels to the Americas," Ragnok said.

"The Americas! You've tunneled under the ocean?" exclaimed James.

Ragnok smiled thinly and turned to James. "There is much that we do not tell others. The wizards never thought we were capable, so they never asked what we could do. It will take time to overcome the resentment and suspicion that attitude has fostered."

"I meant no disrespect, Lord Ragnok," James stammered. He was seriously wishing his Prime Minister had assigned someone from the Foreign office to this job instead of him.

"And I detected none," countered Ragnok easily. "Since our first meeting, we have used our contacts to find out more about your

world, and frankly, there were things that amazed me. I daresay we will have much to learn from each other."

Ragnok turned back to Harry. "Brusk is ready to inspect the refuge you offer."

Harry nodded. "Ronan, take our honored guest to Disko Island. Show him the Weyr, then escort him to the chamber we set up for Polenth and his clan."

The meeting ground to a halt while they watched Ronan Clark put his goggles and helm back on, then he mounted Garanoth. Once he was seated he reached down and offered a hand to Brusk, who looked at him in surprise before grabbing the offered hand.

Garanoth sprang aloft and they vanished a moment later.

"Amazing," murmured Ragnok. "How long will it take for them to arrive?"

"Roughly three seconds," Harry replied. "The distance doesn't matter to the dragon."

"My Lord," James said, jumping into the conversation. "I have been authorized to tell you that should the Wizards attack you, my government is prepared to commit a significant force to repelling them. With the help of the Weyr, we could deliver a significant force to your city, as well as above ground."

Harry nodded in agreement. He had spoken to James about this several times, pointing out they had the ability to lift nearly one thousand people at a time if they used all of the dragons in the Weyr.

"Your people would fight along side our own?" Ragnok asked incredulously.

James smiled. "You recognize the Crown as being the supreme authority above ground. The Crown recognizes that your realm extends far beyond our own borders, although I was unaware of your tunneling abilities. We also recognize that the Ministry of Magic is in rebellion against the Crown. They are our enemy and we will fight them wherever we must."

Ragnok nodded thoughtfully. He also recognized the common need the Goblins shared with the muggles.

"It is the hope of my Prime Minister that after this crisis is over, we can sit down and find ventures that might be mutually profitable to both our societies. Your tunnelers, for example. I know we lack the ability to make a tunnel from Britain to the Americas. Just learning from your tunnelers would be a big boon to our engineers," James said with enthusiasm.

Ragnok looked a little surprised, then he turned to Harry, hoping he could shed some light on what James said. "Engineers?" he echoed.

"In muggle society, engineers are people who determine how something is to be made. They plan it out carefully then usually oversee its construction. If you wanted to build a bridge, you would hire an engineer to design it first," Harry said, then he turned to Remus with a shrug. He couldn't explain it any better.

"You have smiths in your society, Lord Ragnok. But sometimes a job becomes too big for one man to do. When you decided to make a tunnel, isn't it true that you have one Master Tunneler who directs the effort?" asked Remus.

Ragnok nodded.

"An engineer is like that Master Tunneler," Remus said.

"Ah. Intriguing concept," muttered Ragnok.

James looked confused by the conversation.

"It's a difference between the two societies, James. The goblins have some of the best crafters in the world. Armor, weapons, jewelry, they are experts in shaping metals into objects of superlative quality. But it's all handmade, one of a kind items. Mass marketing is an idea that never really caught on in the magical world. I would bet that every tunnel they make is uniquely different, as well."

Harry sat back and relaxed a little while James, Remus and Ragnok talked about the differences between the two cultures.

Casually looking around, he spotted May looking rather impatient. She was attached to his Wing despite Hermione's displeasure. Normally he wouldn't have insisted she come along, but he knew for a fact that the infirmary was empty this morning and Hagrid was nearby, so she wasn't really needed there.

He was concerned that her duties were keeping her too Weyr bound of late.

"Trath, tell your rider to relax and enjoy the scenery. I know she'd rather be in the infirmary, but she can't spend all her time there," he sent. "It is a beautiful city."

He smiled when May started, then she turned to look at him. He grinned back at her despite her glare.

"I told her, Weyrleader," Trath replied. "I don't think she likes being underground and I'm not sure I do, either. I think I like the open sky over my head."

"Hopefully, we won't be here much longer. We're waiting on Garanoth to return. I don't like being underground either, Trath, but it's a small sacrifice to make for friends."

"You know, Harry, you could use this time to practice flirting with May. Smelly Dog gave you flirting lessons, but you never use them," Chekiath suddenly announced. Harry knew that Chekiath sent that in a way that Trath would be able to relay it to May.

"May would like you flirting with her. I see her checking out your flanks all the time, though she calls that area your arse," Trath added helpfully.

Harry made a choking sound and Remus shot him a glance. He turned away, but not before he noticed May turning beet red next to her dragon. She was shooting Trath glares, which the dragon seemed to ignore.

Fortunately at that moment, Garanoth reappeared overhead. Everyone flinched at the blast of cold air.

The dragon landed and Ronan helped Brusk slide down before he looked up and grinned at Harry, then dismounted.

Brusk rushed over to Ragnok and they spoke rapidly in gobbledegook for several minutes. The Master Tunneler seemed to be very excited about something.

Finally, Ragnok turned to Harry. "I did not know dragon fire could be used to excavate tunnels," he said.

Harry looked at him in surprise, then he shrugged. "I do not know how much control the dragons had over their flame before they awoke. I can only assume it wasn't as fine a control as it is now. The dragons have been a big help in hollowing out chambers for Polenth and our hatching chamber."

"Our fire is hotter now than it was and our control greater. During the Time of the Beasts, it was just fire," Spath admitted.

Harry looked at the elder dragon in surprise, then he turned back to Ragnok. The goblin leader was still staring at the elder dragon.

"Lord Ragnok, if our dragons can assist in your digging efforts, I know they would be happy to help. We know you haven't reached the full profit potential you once had with dragons. Perhaps in this way you can achieve that?" Harry said softly.

Ragnok looked thoughtfully at Harry for a moment, then he turned to Polenth, who was standing behind Harry, next to Chekiath. "Polenth, would your people be willing to help in our tunnel efforts?"

"If it would help further our friendship, we would," Polenth replied. The senior underground dragon knew Harry wanted to cement the relationship between dragons and goblins and this would help do just that.

Ragnok nodded. "Brusk says your dragons can tunnel faster and better than we can with walls smoother than the ones made with the finest polish. He also says that your hatching Weyr is just months from erupting. Fortunately, we can fix that."

James leaned forward in his chair. "You can stop a volcano from erupting?"

Ragnok shook his head. "Stop, no. Delay by many years, yes. With all of the tunneling we've done, diverting lava flows has become a necessity for us. We have spells we can use to open lateral fissures deep in the rock below, allowing the lava to spread sideways instead of pressing upwards. It would relieve the pressure on the main lava chamber and delay the eruption for many years."

James nodded and swallowed nervously. Here was a benefit no one envisioned.

"Weyrleader, we would like to take advantage of your dragons to help us. In return, I will send our best team to work on the lava under your hatching Weyr. With our efforts, we can delay an eruption for at least fifty years, perhaps longer. Some of our oldest diversions have lasted centuries."

Harry smiled broadly, then he glanced at Polenth. "Polenth would you assign as many dragons as needed to ensure that Lord Ragnok and his family have transportation in the event of an emergency? Then start working with Master Tunneler Brusk."

"It will be done as you say, Weyrleader," Polenth replied.

"Lord Ragnok," Harry said, turning back to him. "Dragons will be here within minutes of your telling any dragon that you need us. I suggest using this square as an assembly point for the evacuation. Tell your people to dress warmly. The trip Between is brief but uncomfortably cold."

Brusk nodded vigorously in agreement to Harry's statement about the cold.

"Our forces will be equally fast in arriving, since the Weyrleader has promised his dragons to ferry them. The Weyrleader's dragons will bring in our forces and leave taking the people you want to protect," added James.

Ragnok nodded. "Very well then. Weyrleader, I will inform Polenth when our people are assembled to correct the problem at your hatching Weyr."

Harry stood and sketched a brief bow. "Thank you, Lord Ragnok."

The others stood and gave the goblin a bow as well before walking over to the waiting dragons.

Ragnok watched the dragons spring aloft and vanish. He shook his head, then he noted Polenth still nearby. "Polenth, perhaps you can come by tomorrow? There is much I think I need to learn about your race, and the man that leads them."

"Of course, Lord Holder," Polenth replied.

Campbeltown Weyr, evening, May 22nd...

Sirius closed the large metal door and padlocked it shut.

Nearby, Katherine watched in silence, unhappy with what she was seeing. Magic, she thought, could be really ugly and this was ugliness at its worst.

Sirius sighed. He hated this with a passion, but there was nothing he could do about it. He hated the feeling of helplessness. Katherine moved to stand by his side and without thinking about it he reached for her hand.

"I hate this," he whispered.

"I know. It seems so unfair," she replied sadly.

Several dragons moved to sit around the low slung concrete bomb shelter. They would watch and spend their night talking to the person inside.

"What's going on?"

Sirius jerked out of his thoughts and glanced up. Nearby was Mildred O'Connor the American astronomer from NASA. She had a small cart she was pulling and on that cart was the strangest looking thing he had ever seen. It looked like a small cannon!

Katherine and Sirius exchanged a look. "I don't see why not," he muttered. "She's going to be here long enough to see it again."

"I'll do it then," Katherine offered. Sirius nodded unhappily and looked away.

"Doctor O'Connor, by now I'm sure you've seen some things which defy reality as you know it. Magical things?" Katherine said.

"Yes, I've seen some mighty strange things that would have sent my college professors into a fit of hysterics," admitted the woman.

Katherine smiled softly. She could sympathize. "Tonight is a full moon. Because of that, we have to lock Mr. Lupin inside this bomb shelter for the night. This way he won't be a danger to us or to himself."

Mildred stared at the army captain in astonishment. "You make him sound like he's some kind of monster!"

Sirius jerked as if kicked. "He's no monster! He's just sick!"

"Sirius, please let me," Katherine said soothingly, then she turned back to O'Connor. "Doctor -"

"Mildred, please. Doctor Standish may enjoy being called Doctor but I'm not so formal," O'Connor replied.

Katherine smiled. "Mildred, then. Remus is sick. He has a magical illness called Lycanthropy. He is a werewolf, just like we've seen on the telly all these years. Once a month he undergoes a painful transformation into an uncontrollable beast. There are potions which can help him, but each have their drawbacks."

Mildred blinked in surprise. "It's incurable?" she exclaimed.

Katherine nodded, then looked over at Sirius, who was looking away and trying to control his emotions.

"He was a child when he was bit," he said softly. "Barely six years old. He was walking home with his child minder when they were attacked. The girl was killed, and he was left for dead, but he lived.

"His family was forced to move away from the town. They were outcasts because they protected their only son."

He paused and started to take a breath when a muffled howl came from the bomb shelter and the heavy door rattled ominously.

"You are not alone, Wolf. Remember that you are a man," Norendrath said as he turned his big head towards the shelter.

Several other dragons repeated his comment. Then each, in turn, spoke to the man inside, reminding him of his humanity. It seemed to help reduce the growling from behind the two inch steel plate doors.

Mildred shivered. She and Remus had taken to having breakfast together. They enjoyed some wonderful conversations and he had even come with her on some nights when she dragged her large Dobsonian telescope out to view the night sky. His knowledge of the heavens had surprised her. He could point out constellations that only an astronomical historian might know, and yet modern cosmology eluded him. He didn't know about stellar nurseries or super massive black holes.

"Why didn't he tell me?" she asked, mostly to herself. "I thought he was my friend."

"Put yourself in his shoes," Sirius replied. "Throughout his life he's been shunned because of a disease. I remember his first girlfriend in sixth year at Hogwarts. When he finally told her, she broke it off between them. He's been hurt so many times he doesn't go around advertising that once a month he's an uncontrollable beast."

She shivered again. "Well, he's my friend. I'm not going to turn him away because of an illness," she declared.

Sirius smiled, "Thank you," he murmured. "He'll be happy to know that. I know he's enjoyed your friendship and company."

"Has anyone ever checked him medically?" she asked.

Sirius frowned. "We can't cure his disease," he said flatly.

Mildred waved a hand, dismissing his complaint. "I mean checked him with our medical sciences? Has anyone ever done a blood test on him? Screened him for pathogens or known infectious agents? That sort of thing."

Sirius looked surprised and he shook his head. "No, I don't think so. Lily Potter suggested such a thing, but then they went into hiding, so I don't know if it was ever done."

"I'll talk to Sir Robert about it. Even if we can't treat it, there must be something we can do to make it easier for him," Mildred declared. She glanced at her cart and telescope and sighed. "I guess I'll turn in. I was hoping to find Remus and see if he'd like to do some star gazing tonight," she said sadly.

"I'm sure he'll be up to it in a day or two," Katherine offered.

Mildred nodded with a weak smile and started to push her cart back towards the quarters she had been assigned.

Sirius watched her trudge away for a minute, then he grinned at Katherine. "That was a surprise," he said.

"No, it really wasn't. You're just not as observant as some of us," she replied primly. "A number of the girls have noticed that Remus and Mildred seemed to be getting close. She's led a lonely life and so has Remus. Despite their very different backgrounds, I think they could be good for each other."

"I hope so, Remus could use some good in his life. It's hard to understand how difficult his life has been. Hell, even I don't understand it all. Harry does, I think and I know Remus treasures his relationship with Harry. But it would be nice to see him have something more, you know?"

She looped her arm in his and hugged his arm against her. They had been keeping their own relationship low key, but she could easily see it moving ahead. Another muffled howl came from the bomb shelter and she glanced over at it. She had watched Remus enter this shelter several times now and she hated what it did to such a nice man. "I think I do," she replied, then she tugged on Sirius to get him moving back towards the social hall. "I hope her idea works out."

Sirius wrapped an arm around her waist and they started walking towards the low building in the distance. He could hear music playing from Hangar Seven and he knew Hagrid was probably

staying up with a sick dragon. "Me, too," he said with fervor. "Me, too."

Harry's quarters, Campbeltown Weyr, evening, May 22nd...

Hermione stepped into the large room that served as Harry's sitting room and study. It was a pretty impersonal place with only a couch, several armchairs and a coffee table. There was a television in one corner, which she was certain had never been turned on. The walls were empty, save for one large world map that contained pins marking the location of every Weyr.

She glanced over at Chekiath's stall and shook her head. The dragon's stall was adorned with fantasy dragon art just like his stall in Harry's office. She had looked at the pictures before and could only shake her head. Most of the images included one scantily clad girl. She couldn't really complain, as the images revealed far less than the typical page three girl photo.

Of Harry, there was little to be seen. His rooms were cold and lacking in any warmth.

Harry walked into the room from the little kitchenette his quarters had. He didn't know it, but he was using the former base commanders quarters, and as such, it contained features not found elsewhere on the base. He set the tray down and poured Hermione a cup of tea, fixing it just as she preferred, then he poured one for himself before sitting down on the couch.

"Difficult day?"

He sighed and took a sip of his tea. "You have no idea," he murmured, then he turned slightly on the couch to look at her. "You would think that offering the goblins help with no strings attached would be attractive to them. Except they don't like to owe anyone a favor. As a result, we learned that Disko is very close to erupting, but the Goblins have a way of delaying the eruption by decades, maybe longer."

Hermione looked startled. "The volcano is going to erupt?"

"Not if the goblins can get to it in time. Tomorrow, Polenth's clan will ferry a team of goblin tunnelers to Disko, where they will work some

magic to relieve the pressure on the main lava chamber," he replied, then he clenched a fist. "I should have seen that coming."

"You did see it coming, Harry," she replied.

"What?" he said looking at her in confusion.

"You asked Sir Robert to look into it. Don't you remember?"

He looked puzzled, then he held up a hand and from his bed room his little notebook flew into his open hand. He flipped through several pages. "Oh, yeah, here it is. I meant to add another item to remind me to ask Sir Robert what he found out."

She gestured at the book. "Why isn't Ronan handling most of that for you?"

He glanced up, a bit surprised by her tone. "He's handling all of the Wing duties now. This is all Weyr stuff. It wouldn't be fair for me to ask him to do more."

Hermione deflated a bit. She knew about the Wing duties, having done more than a fair share of them herself. Her Wing Leader, Marty Benson, was a nice enough boy and nearly two years older than she was. But he did tend to place some of the less pleasant Wing duties in her lap.

"Hermione, I'm sorry about leaving you behind today. Honestly, it was a fairly dull day. I had to talk to Ragnok and make him understand we were serious about our offer," he said, trying to convey his regret.

"It's fine, Harry. I understand that you had to speak to him. And according to Ronan, it wasn't as dull as you make it out to be. This was one of those times when the Weyrleader needed to talk to the leader of the Goblins," she replied.

"And you're worried that I left you behind because of what happened the last time I had to act as Weyrleader," he said, then he smiled reassuringly. "You shouldn't be, you know. I left you behind because I was only taking Wing One, not because of a mistake that I doubt you'll ever repeat."

Hermione blushed and looked down at her hands. She hadn't expected Harry to read her so accurately.

Harry sighed and put his tea on the coffee table, then he scooted closer to Hermione and took one of her hands in his. When she looked up at him in surprise, he smiled. "I didn't take you because you weren't in the Wing I was taking. For that matter, I didn't include you in my Wing because I didn't want to have to deal with someone accusing me of playing favorites. I did include May and she can tell you she hated tagging along on what, for her, was a mind numbingly boring trip."

Harry glanced over at Cheki's stall where his dragon lay, watching the pair with interest. "I'm not suited well for this job, Hermione," he said softly. "I have to play so many roles that I just don't know how to play, so I stumble along and hope I don't mess up too badly. In the last week, I've met with the Prime Minister and the High Lord of the Goblins. In both cases I was a nervous wreck, but I muddled through. It's all I can do, muddle through and hope I don't screw things up too badly."

"You won't screw anything up, Harry," Chekiath said from his stall. "You do exactly what you know you need to do every time. I have watched you enter into each meeting nervous and felt the nervousness melt away once the meeting started. There's a fire in you. You are strong, like me. You won't be the tallest rider, but you will be the best. That's why I have to be the biggest dragon with the most mates. For the honor of my kind, our weyr and all riders everywhere, you and I will be the best and do what we must."

"Oh, good. And here I thought you wanted the most mates because you wanted to get laid a lot!" Harry replied to Chekiath, grinning

"Harry!" exclaimed Hermione. "I'm sure it's a dragon thing, some sort of prestige or hierarchy in the dragon culture for him to have many mates. You don't have to be crude about it."

"But I do want to get laid a lot," exclaimed Chekiath, as he turned to look at Hermione. "The females all admire my scales and I like them. They want to have eggs by me. And why wouldn't they? I am the Weyrleader's dragon."

Harry chuckled and shook his head. "Look at it this way, Hermione. If Comaloth is anything like Chekiath, you'll be getting advice for the rest of your life."

She winced and tried to bring the conversation back onto safer ground. She wasn't about to mention the advice the her dragon had been dishing out. "So, the goblins agreed then?"

Harry nodded. "They did. Polenth has a big group of large males that will help inside the tunnels should the WDF attack. The rest of his clan will move to Disko as a precaution. Our effort will be limited. We can't work in the tunnels. Most of our rider bound dragons are too big, and only smaller dragons like the Vipertooth or Chinese Fireball would be comfortable in the tunnels. A Horntail would probably get stuck."

"So, all we're going to do is evacuate goblins?"

He shook his head. "No, but it's a matter of space to maneuver. If the WDF amasses up in Diagon Alley, we can attack them from the air. Or, if the worst happens and the goblins are pushed back into Gringault, we can attack there. But there's just not enough room for us anywhere else."

He paused and reached for his tea. After taking a sip, he sighed. "It's the same thing when the military confronts the Ministry. We can't fight inside the Ministry building, and short of tearing the building apart, our involvement with that fight will be minimal. I suspect they'll ask us to occupy Hogwarts, perhaps Hogsmeade, or ask us to give security to the Queen."

Hermione shook her head. "You've really thought this out, haven't you?"

He chuckled. "Well, Katherine has been pounding it into my head about our capabilities and where they can and can't be applied. And I really don't want us to kill anyone."

They settled into a comfortable silence for a few minutes, then Hermione broke it. "Harry?"

"Hm?"

"I realize that this may sound silly, but I am very proud of you," she said in a whisper.

He turned and looked at her in shock. "What?"

She shrugged and looked embarrassed. "You seem to have everything thought out and your priorities are crystal clear; protect us and our dragons. Even when you know that we have to fight for our dragons, you try to find ways to make sure we're safe."

He blushed and looked away, his hands playing with his small notebook.

"Harry?" she said worriedly. His reaction seemed a little off. His color was deepening and so was his breathing.

"I think we best call it a night, Hermione," he said in a strangled tone.

"Momnarth just rose for a mating flight," Comaloth announced to her privately. "Now is your chance to mate with Harry."

She glanced at her watch. It was barely 8 p.m. She reached out to touch his shoulder and he flinched violently away from her.

"Don't!" he gasped.

She sighed, then nodded slowly. "I'm sorry. Comaloth told me that Momnarth is rising."

He nodded and looked away from her.

She was concerned. There was something more going on here than just a reaction to a mating flight. She stood. "I'll see you at breakfast?"

He nodded and she turned for the door. She had just reached for the doorknob when he stopped her.

"Hermione," he called, "I'm sorry." He still wouldn't look at her.

She gave him a smile in return. "Try to get some rest, Harry. I'll see you in the morning."

He waved and she left his quarters.

I wonder what that was all about, she thought.

"Chekiath says Harry is afraid." Comaloth said in reply to her question.

Hermione paused and tilted her head. "Afraid of what?"

"You and the other female riders. The mating flight affects him and with you present he had to work harder to maintain control. Chekiath says that several of the girls could cause the same reaction. He is so afraid he will do something that hurts you or one of the other riders. Chekiath says it frightens him."

Hermione trudged back to her weyr, thinking deeply and wondering if she should bring this up with the other girls.

Dumbledore's office, Campbeltown Weyr, May 23rd...

The door opened and Harry stuck his head in. He was surprised to see Albus talking intently with Croaker. He had forgotten he had invited the man to the Weyr.

"Harry! Good morning!" Albus called, smiling brightly. "Do come in."

"I hope I'm not intruding?"

"Not at all, not at all. I was telling Alejandro about the dragons true history."

Harry nodded. "It is a surprising history."

Croaker leaned back on his chair and shook his head. "It's a lot more than a surprise. It's a radical shift and I'm not sure we can survive it."

Harry shrugged. "You don't have much choice, I'm afraid. The wizards will either learn to adapt or they will die out. Personally, I don't think you're giving them enough credit. Sure, a bunch of the old pureblood families might die out, but in the long run, the half bloods and muggle born will see the wizards through this."

"You're a wizard, too, you know," Croaker said.

Harry smiled and shook his head, then he spotted someone walking past the open door and he called him over. "Wayne, come here for a moment please."

Wayne Hopkins looked up from the clipboard he was reading as he walked back and spotted Harry. He turned and entered the room.

"Wayne, I'd like you to meet Mr. Croaker. He's a good friend of Albus'," Harry said.

Croaker smiled at Hopkins. He knew his father and his grandfather. He came from a distinguished line of magical jewelry makers and could be consider prime pureblood stock.

"Wayne, humor me, please, by answering a simple question. What are you?" Harry asked.

Wayne looked at Harry as if he were crazy. "I'm Lordeth's rider."

Harry nodded affably. "And what are you working on?"

Wayne blushed slightly. "I meant to speak to you about that, Harry. I'm working with the Americans on designing their experiments to baseline the dragons."

Harry grinned at hearing such technospeak from a pureblood. "What did you want to talk about?"

"It's really interesting stuff I'm doing. You meant it when you spoke about us attending school to learn more about this stuff, didn't you?" he asked hopefully.

"I meant it, Wayne. We'll all have opportunities to attend school."

Wayne nodded happily and Harry dismissed him with a smile, then he turned back to Croaker. "Lordeth's rider. Not a wizard, not a British subject. He has a new identity and every one of my riders will answer in a similar manner."

He paused and looked around the office for a moment. "It's not meant as an insult, Mr. Croaker, but no matter their roots, the

bonded wizards consider themselves riders. You are worried about your society falling apart, and you're right to worry because it is going to happen. The question is what will you preserve and what will you rebuild better than it was? You're faced with a unique opportunity, very similar to what we face. We're building something new to our experience here. You have the chance to rebuild a better wizarding society."

Croaker nodded thoughtfully. "I never saw it quite like that before."

Harry grinned, then he turned to Dumbledore. "Albus, I have a question. How hard is it to make anti-apparation and anti-portkey wards?"

Dumbledore looked up at him sharply. "It depends," he replied cautiously, "mostly on how big of an area you want to cover. Hogwarts, for example is a castle. It doesn't cover even a third of the area that the Weyr does. So the wards are carved into stone at the base of the castle and cover the castle and most of the grounds. In fact, Hagrid's old hut used to sit on the boundary. Stand in his door and you couldn't apparate, move to stand by his fireplace and you could."

"And a large area like Campbeltown?" pressed Harry.

"I used eight ward stones for the Weyr, Harry. Each one creates a zone in which you can't apparate. By placing them correctly, you overlap some spots, but with eight stones you cover the entire Weyr," Albus said, then he frowned. "If you would just come out and say what you have in mind I might be able to tell you what you need to do."

Harry looked chagrined. "Sorry, I was hoping to find a way of avoiding another Irtysh River incident."

"That was you?" exclaimed Croaker.

Harry turned to him with a questioning expression.

Croaker grinned broadly. "Word out of Russia was that a horde of Succubus' riding enslaved dragons assaulted a Russian force of wizards trying to retake a dragon reserve. The report went on to say that the wizards bravely fought until they managed to escape before

the demons could rape them. I didn't believe it, but the undeniable fact is that some fifty wizards appeared nearly naked in the lobby of the Russian Ministry, and some were hysterical in fear."

Harry looked over at Dumbledore, who was fighting to hold back his laughter and he lost it. Croaker watched between the pair until they settled down.

"I take it that was your doing?" he asked.

Harry nodded with a chuckle. "They attacked the Weyr while we were conducting a census. Draco went down with a cutting hex and the Wing refused to leave him. That effectively pinned the entire Weyr in place, as none of the dragons would leave Draco behind.

"We arrived, subdued the wizards, then I ordered my Wing Second to strip them of all their wands and other objects. Ronan couldn't tell what was enchanted and what wasn't, so he ordered them to strip down to their shorts. I would guess they made up that story to account for their embarrassing return."

"Succubi," Dumbledore repeated with a wondering tone. He shook slightly, then he turned his attention back to Harry. "Getting back to your question. Making ward stones isn't difficult and placing them is fairly easy, once you know how they need to be placed. Charging the stones, however, is not a trivial affair. I charged the stones for the Weyr and then slept for ten hours. Admittedly, I'm no longer a spring chicken and I shouldn't be doing such magic, but charging ward stones is not an easy casting."

Croaker nodded. "It can be a real exhausting affair if you're not careful."

Harry sighed and reached for his notebook. He flipped it open and scanned several of the entries. "There are thirty five total Weyrs world wide. So far, Campbeltown is by far one of the largest Weyrs we've surveyed. Perhaps the way to do this is to create the ward stones and figure out the placement based on the census data. Then, when the Weyr goes visiting this summer, we could install the stones then.

"There are enough magical riders that we can switch off charging the stones. That way, no one person ends up exhausted."

Dumbledore smiled grandly. "A wonderful solution, Harry. I'll create enough extra stones so that I can let every magical rider try their hand at charging them."

Harry nodded, then he made a note in his book. "One item down, one new item added," he muttered then he looked up at Dumbledore. "Thanks for your help," he said, then nodded to Croaker and walked from the room.

"I am coming to see your point, Albus," Croaker said softly. "He really doesn't care what happens, as long as it doesn't affect the dragons."

"Sadly, I fear you are correct. But I also fear that it will go much deeper than just dragons. In a way, he has set himself up as the advocate of all sapient creatures. I will continue to support Harry and his riders, but if you are to lead the effort to rebuild the Wizarding society here in Britain, you will need to learn to work with Harry. His position on the sapient races is the same as the muggles. They are our equals. You may find that distasteful, but it is a truth you need to accept."

Meanwhile, Harry paused outside of Sir Robert's office when he spotted an unusual sight. "What is going on?" he asked.

Sir Robert looked up and smiled widely at Harry. Remus sat in a chair and Mildred O'Connor had a hand on his shoulder. His sleeve was rolled up and Corporal Stone was drawing blood into a series of test tubes.

Mildred looked up from the procedure. "We're drawing some of Remus' blood so it can be sent for analysis. I don't want to get any hopes up, but it's possible that modern medical science might be able to help where magical medicine cannot."

Harry stared at Mildred for a moment, then he smiled widely. He looked at Remus. "Remus," he said breathlessly.

"It's just a test, Harry," Remus replied.

"But still, it's a chance," he protested, then he turned to Mildred. "Where is the blood being sent?"

Mildred nodded to Sir Robert, who was labeling the test tubes.

"We're sending some samples to the Health Protection Agency and Mildred has arranged with her people to have another sample tested at the Centers for Disease Control in the States."

"I'm hoping they can isolate the pathogen and figure out something to do about it from there," Mildred said softly.

Remus looked at Harry's expression and frowned. "It's just a test," he repeated.

Harry shook his head. "No, it's not," he replied firmly. "It's a hope that didn't exist before today." He turned to Mildred. "Thank you. Will you let me know how it goes?"

Surprised, she nodded to him and he smiled before turning to leave the office.

"He shouldn't get his hopes up so," Remus muttered.

Mildred looked at him and frowned. "He cares a great deal for you. It's obvious to anyone who watches him."

Remus looked at her dubiously and she smiled sadly. "You've been on the outside for your entire life, and yet people like Harry and Sirius care deeply for you. Is that so hard for you to accept?"

He glanced at her in surprise. She had come to him the day after his transformation and spoke with him about it. He was shocked and surprised to discover she was upset that he had hid his condition from her.

"It's different from what I'm used to," he admitted.

She sniffed loudly and watched Corporal Stone remove the tourniquet from his arm. "Get used to it, Remus. There are more people who care about you than you know."

She shook her head and turned to Sir Robert, who was holding out the packaged samples she was sending to the States. She took the

package and walked from the room, leaving Remus staring at her and wondering if she was hinting at something more.

Office of the Minister, Ministry for Magic, May 25th...

Umbridge watched in seething silence.

"At first we thought the Tuscanys were wiped out in the blast, but we've now confirmed that they managed to escape to Switzerland. One of the first things they did was transfer what gold they had from Gringotts London to Gringotts Zurich. From what we've managed to learn, the family wasn't as reliant on the goblins as other wizards. They maintained a large number of accounts in muggle banks.

"I personally hand delivered a request to extradite the family back to Britain, but I was forcefully told that the family had asked for, and been granted, asylum as political refugees. I'm afraid they are beyond our reach for the time being," Brent Thompson said, then he looked up from his parchment to Fudge.

"And our forces?"

"At the time of the explosion we had just over eight hundred members of the WDF. The explosion cost us forty two dead and another thirty eight injured. However, the injured are starting to return to duty. The healers assure me that only a few will need to be mustered out on medical grounds. I've been looking over the figures for our force size and I'm going to suggest we wait until late June to deal with the goblins."

Delores scowled and crossed her arms in a huff. Fudge shot her a glare and she cringed back. Thompson, her second in command, was steadily eroding her position as the head of the WDF and Fudge was going along with it. She was being marginalized and hadn't found a way of stopping it.

"Oh? Why?" asked Fudge. He leaned forward on his chair and reached for his cup of tea. This was a man no one had really seen before. It came as a shock to find the Minister being so decisive and calm.

"Two reasons, sir," Thompson replied respectfully. "First, Hogwarts will be closed by then, and while we haven't recruited from the

school directly, we have enough inquiries from graduating students that I believe we may pick up thirty or forty more people for the WDF. Secondly, June twenty first is a goblin holiday. It is one of the two days a year in which Gringotts maintains a very reduced staff. As I see it, the first objective is to take the building. Once we've secured it, we'll start working our way down the tunnels themselves towards their city. Having fewer goblins in the building to start will make that job easier."

Fudge glanced up at a wall calendar. "Yes, that might work. Very well, halt all further attacks on the Wizengamot families. Use the respite to rebuild the WDF and continue training."

"Yes, sir," replied Thompson.

"Is there anything else anyone needs to bring up?" Fudge asked.

"I have one thing, sir," said Greese Withers. He was an old and unpopular wizard who ran the Office of Muggle Liaison.

"Yes?"

"Just a reminder, sir. You have your usual appointment with the Prime Minister on the fifteenth of next month."

Fudge nodded. "Yes, well, we all know how that will go," he mused softly. After the laughter died down he grinned. "Thank you, everyone. It was a profitable meeting."

Everyone stood and started to make their way to the door.

"Madam Umbridge, would you stay behind please?"

He waited until the others had left the room and the door closed behind them.

Delores stood nervously, watching the man she once thought she had under control.

"Did you think I wouldn't find out, Delores?"

"Find out about what?" she asked nervously.

Fudge leaned back in his chair and smiled. It was a cold smile and it sent shivers down her spine.

"Thompson came to me the other day and told me he had been spelled by someone. He had to go for his yearly checkup with the healers and they discovered your spell work. From there, it was an easy matter to discover you were trying to use him to tip off various people in the Wizengamot to our plans."

Umbridge blanched and a thin line of sweat formed on her brow. "Cornelius, you need to understand that I was only trying to..."

"Enough!" he said loudly, cutting her off. "Delores, I've tried being lenient. I've tried to remember the times when we worked together well. But you've been deliberately skirting the edges of breaking your vow to me by tricking Thompson into doing it for you. As much as I'd like to declare your oath broken, the sound of you screaming in pain while you writhe on my office floor doesn't interest me, and it would cause too many questions. So, I'm reassigning you. Go talk to Withers. From this moment on, you're his new administrative assistant. I'll be nice and let you keep your Undersecretary title, for now. Demoting you would cause far too many rumors that I don't want to deal with."

She stared at him for a moment, then she collapsed to the floor in a faint.

Cornelius scowled, then he stood and walked to the door. "Dawlish! Come here and escort Madam Umbridge to her new posting in Muggle Liaison."

Cornelius stepped out of the way and held the door open while Dawlish levitated Umbridge out of the office. "It's all right people," he said to his staff in the outer office. "She just fainted. She's very excited by her new position."

Several people smiled at their Minister and went back to work.

Officially, the first commercial power generation station for consumer use went online in early 1998. Unlike the test station at Campbeltown, which had no public service, it was the first of the truly clean power stations and it became a model upon which all future power stations were designed.

Excerpted from The Weyrs of Earth by Remus John Lupin, published 2040.

Author's Notes and Mockeries:

-Bill Lewis writes, "Just a note about runway designations...while you are correct in the last zero being dropped, the designations are based on 360 degrees in a circle...therefore, if one end of a runway is designated 29 (290 degrees) the the reciprocal would be runway 7 (70 degrees) not runway 11." And then he slinks away with no way to reply to him since his pm's are turned off. I've dealt with this before here is the same reply I've PM'd others.

According to the pilot information for the runway, 10,003 x 151 ft (3,049 x 46 m) — paved — lighted— threshold 11 displaced 600 ft (183 m) — threshold 29 displaced 1,400 ft (427 m)

Aviation Technospeak translated:

10,003 long by 151 wide. Paved and lit for night operations, From 11(0) degrees, landing threshold is actually 600ft from the end of the runway. This is to allow overrun space and heavy landings. From 29(0) degrees the landing threshold is displaced by 1400 feet.

Google Earth shows the runways clearly marked as 29 and 11. The pilot information listed online confirms that. If you want to argue math I suggest you take it up with the British Aviation Agency and not me since I didn't paint the runway numbers.

- There has been some question about Thread. Thread is a life form that is found in the Oort cloud surrounding Pern's primary star Rukbat. Sometime in the distant past the system managed to capture a rogue planet and place it into a highly elliptical orbit. Called the "Red Star" by the colonists, the red star would pass close to Pern roughly every 250 years (sometimes it took longer than that). As it did this close pass, Pern would pass through the cloud of spores caught in the rogue planet's gravity and fall to the ground. Heat from the reentry would release the thread, bringing it back to life. Thread is a voracious life form capable of consuming all organic matter. Fire kills it, or it can starve to death if it landed on a rocky area. Passes lasted for fifty years. Thread is a super fungus and the dragons were designed to kill thread as it was falling to the ground. Hopefully that answers that.

- I had to laugh at all the people that are concerned that Harry had made an enemy of wizards with his striking that guy in last chapter. I mean really, Harry considers most wizards his enemy and if you haven't realized that by now either you're missing what I'm writing or not I'm doing a good enough job of explaining stuff.

- This is a message to all those people that just had to tell me they are Snape fans. I feel for you, no really I do. I bet you like to kick puppies too. Although, feeding Snape into an industrial fan... hmmm there's a disclaimer in that.

- I think it should be apparent by now that Newt Scamander isn't callous or uncaring. He truly cares for magical animals, dragons included, but he's also coming from the point of view as a user of their products. Me? I love steak, give me a good ol porter house steak and a baked tater and I'm happy. Sorry mister Cow, but given a choice between my big mac and you living free and happy, you lose. Not happening. Peta sickos excluded, they should be tossed into a pen with a steer and smeared with hormones. So Scamander isn't callous, he's just looking at them as animals to use.

- And finally, a Fic recommendation. Aealket writes some really good stuff, but his "When is it a contract?" is one of the most interesting short pieces I've read. Check his stuff out and read that Contract tale for a very unique look at Luna.

Standard Disclaimer:

"But I don't want to!" whined the red head.

Bob looked up from his console and frowned. That sounded like someone he didn't have in this story. What was going on here?

Opening the door to his office he nodded to the dozen Naked Donut Delivery girls waiting for him to take the donuts he smirked. Stupid Naked Donut Delivery girls, he thought, they will stand around forever as long as you don't take the donut. Ah donuts...

He stepped out onto the stage to see Ron Weasley, in a tutu and carrying a parasol, standing on the stage tap dancing.

He stood for a moment and blinked. Then he blinked again, just to make sure his eyes weren't fooling him.

He turned to Alyx. "What are you doing?" he asked tightly.

"He sent me a threatening email about not getting enough air time in this story," Alyx exclaimed.

"Ron Weasley sent you an email?" Bob asked doubtfully.

She nodded. "I didn't open it, but I knew from the title promising a larger penis that it had to come from him! All the world knows he has an undersized willie."

Bob rubbed his temples which were pounding. "I don't want to know how you know that."

"There was this scene involving Draco, Snape, Ron, and Voldemort and they were..."

"STOP!" Bob shouted, then he shuddered. "Alright, lets start from the top, what are you doing with Ron?"

"He's going to be our guest disclaimer," Alyx said smugly. "He'll tell everyone that we don't own Harry Potter or the Dragon Riders of Pern. And he gets more air time to make up for his tiny wang."

"Alright, isn't that the outfit our neighbor uses with his dancing bear act?" Bob asked.

Alyx nodded. "Yeah, my tutu was in the wash."

A low growl came from offstage and Bob could see the neighbor's bear wanted its tutu back. Alyx performed an imaginary high five. "That's a ten point bonus!" she howled.

He backed away slowly and turned to face the audience. "Let's start the story before this gets messy. Enjoy the chapter folks. There's going to be blood and much screaming. Poor Ron."

Bob walked away snickering, "Time to get back to my donuts," he muttered.

One of the most intriguing and unexplained aspects of dragons comes from the rare sandy substance found in the bellies of the largest of the beasts. This sand has found uses in time turners and other temporally related items since its discovery in 1763. A small cottage industry making time turners sprang up just outside of Paris, France and it existed until 1792 when the factory and the town vanished in a time paradox, thus starting the creation of the time laws used by all nations today.

Excerpt from *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find them* by Newt Scamander. Published 1927.

Hanger #2, Campbeltown Weyr, May 26th...

Harry climbed onto the stage and waited as the riders and other personnel filed into the small theater area. In the open area behind the seats, many of the dragons gathered.

When the room was filled Harry walked to the podium. "Good evening, everyone. I apologize for eating into your after meal plans, but I called this meeting to cover a few very important points. In addition, James has a bunch of papers that we need to deal with.

"Beginning next week, you riders will start receiving a weekly stipend of two hundred pounds per week. This puts the typical rider at a level below the national average, but unlike the rest of the country,

the Weyr pays for your housing and meals. As we start doing more, the stipend will be adjusted to reflect any changes.

"Lord Mills has opened accounts for each of you and he's offering to help any of our wizards in adjusting to the different money system. Take advantage of his kind offer, people. I promise you, you'll be glad you did.

"Finally, I want to bring two very important people to your notice. Hagrid, May, would you come up here please?"

Both joined Harry on the stage and stood looking rather nervous at being called out.

Harry smiled at them both, then he turned to the others. "I don't need to introduce these two to you, but I want you all to consider something. We are doing something that no other human being has done before. We are developing the Weyr from scratch. I know you've all spoken to your dragons about the Pern Weyrs, but so much of that knowledge just doesn't help us. Numbweed sounds like a wonderful pain killer, but it's a plant native to a planet that man may never find in this time line.

"So, we're doing everything from scratch, and that's where May and Hagrid come in. And so do all of you. Starting today, we're going to begin a new tradition. If any of you invent or think of something that finds its way into general Weyr use, we're going to reward you for it."

He turned to May and Hagrid and smiled broadly. He opened a box and held it up for all to see. It was a round medallion with a golden dragon in the center. "The first ever Dragon Kin medallions go to Hagrid and May for their invention of the life saving bandage paste. They will also receive a bonus of one thousand pounds in their next stipend payment."

He walked over to Hagrid and handed him his medallion.

The big man smiled at Harry and the room broke out in cheers. There wasn't a single rider that hadn't gone to Hagrid at one point for help with their dragon and everyone recognized the unique bond he had with the dragons.

Hearing the cheers, Hagrid broke into tears. "Thank yeh," he mumbled.

Harry laughed and gave his friend a quick hug.

He stepped back and held out a hand, summoning the second box, then he turned to May. "Well done, May," he said softly. He knew it was her idea originally, but it had taken both Hagrid and May to develop the paste.

She took the box from his hands and he surprised her by leaning in and giving her a quick kiss on the cheek. The room broke out again in applause and her blush deepened.

Harry turned back to the riders with a smile. "In a few minutes Lord Mills will call your name. Come up to the table where he has some papers for you to sign."

His smile dimmed a little when he saw Hermione looking rather unhappy, so he nodded to James to begin, then he hopped down off the stage and walked over to Hermione.

She looked up at him with an annoyed expression.

"Come with me," he said.

Her expression changed to one of surprise, as his tone was clearly an order. She stood and followed him into one of the private offices against the far wall.

As soon as he entered the office he turned and leaned against the desk.

"You're mad at me," he said flatly.

"No, I'm not," she replied defensively.

He sighed and ran a hand through his hair. "Hermione, you are mad at me because I kissed May on the cheek. I would have done the same for any of girls had they been up there, but I'm not about to kiss Hagrid."

"I am not mad!" exclaimed Hermione angrily.

He smirked at her and moved closer. "You're mad because I kissed her. She's just a friend."

Hermione huffed and took a step back from him. He was starting to crowd her.

"What are you doing?" she hissed when he moved closer.

When she started to take another step back, he grabbed her by her waist and gently pulled her to him. "I'm going to show you the difference between kisses," he replied. His voice had dropped a register and she couldn't stop the thrill that ran through her at hearing it.

He lightly pecked her on the cheek. "That's the kind of kiss I gave May," he whispered, then he slid his arms around her, pulling her body against his and kissed her deeply.

Her arms slid around him and up to tangle in his hair.

After a solid minute, he slowly let her go and backed away a step, looking deeply into her eyes. She stood motionless for a moment, just watching him.

"Do you see the difference?" he asked quietly.

He took another step back and suddenly froze. His eyes grew wide and he blushed deeply.

Hermione watched him and realized he was surprised by what he had just done. Not that she blamed him. They'd never kissed like that before and she definitely wanted more!

She sighed as she realized that the old Harry was reasserting himself, but she had hope now that perhaps the more confident Harry would show up again soon. "You couldn't have picked a better way of explaining the difference," she said in a slightly dreamy voice.

Harry eyed her carefully, his apology to her for his forward behavior dying before he could even say it. "We should get back out to the others. You've got an account to sign for also."

She nodded with a slightly goofy smile on her face and walked from the room, with Harry following.

What the hell just happened? he asked himself. One moment I'm trying to keep her from getting angry, then we're kissing! He decided he'd have to give this more thought.

Campbeltown Weyr, Kitchen Hall, May 30th...

"Do you mind?"

Remus glanced up from writing in a small notebook and he smiled, seeing Mildred standing at the table holding her breakfast tray.

"No, please sit!" he stammered slightly.

She smiled and sat across from him. "You seemed to be very absorbed by what you were writing."

"I was just working on a record of what I've learned from Spath and some of the other dragons."

She glanced down at his small notebook and frowned. "Why aren't you typing this up on the computer they gave you?"

Remus looked down and flushed slightly. "That thing is evil. I spent a full day typing into it and then it all disappeared! I have a manual typewriter that was given to me by Harry's mum. I use that to type up my notes at least once a week."

Mildred O'Connor smiled and shook her head. She couldn't imagine being so uncomfortable around technology. Remus wasn't too bad, but it was obvious to her that he needed help with his office computer.

"So, what are you working on now?" she asked.

"I've been digging into what I can learn about Pern. We only have one set of memories from Sidraneth, so it's not easy. What I can gather is that the colonists chose a really bad spot when they arrived. They called it landing and it was close to a volcano that they mistakenly thought was extinct."

"Before the volcano, they encountered Thread for the first time," he said quietly. "Think about that. Alone and cut off from civilization and suddenly you find yourself attacked by a mindless creature from outer space. Then being forced to abandon the toehold you had by an erupting volcano of all things."

"It didn't help that they had left behind most of their manufacturing capabilities in favor of an agrarian lifestyle. I guess it makes dragons inevitable," Mildred replied.

He glanced up at her. "What do you mean?"

"Think on it, Remus. You're fleeing from a harsh modern lifestyle in favor of something simpler. You might not bring the abilities to make fighter planes with you, but you do bring the best medical and biological capabilities you can, because you're never sure of what diseases you might encounter. The dragons were designed to fight a mindless, voracious life form that fell from the skies in sheets of thread like filaments. The dragons were Pern's fighter planes. In a way, they were inevitable."

"I suppose it makes sense, although I find it difficult to imagine a world so bad you'd turn your back on it for a simpler life style," he replied.

She smiled and shook her head. "Remus, from my perspective, you live a simpler lifestyle."

He chuckled and looked down at his notebook. Less than a foot away was her laptop computer, left where she placed it when she sat down. "Hey, I'm trying."

She reached out and pat his hand. "Yes, I can see you are, but I think I should spend a little time teaching you how to use that word processor, so things don't disappear on you."

He smiled ruefully. "Maybe. All I know is that, right now, that machine is winning."

A cough interrupted the pair and they both looked up to see Sir Robert standing there, looking grave.

"Sir Robert! Would you care to join us?" asked Remus.

He sat and glanced around carefully. He saw that no one was close enough to the table to overhear him. "Remus, I received a report from the HPA today about your blood tests."

Mildred gripped Remus' hand tightly. "And?" she pressed.

Sir Robert pulled a sheet of paper from a pocket and read for a moment. "The tests for various pathogens came up negative until they tested for rabies. It seems rabies presents itself in a different manner in Wizards than in normal humans."

"Rabies," Mildred said softly, her expression was very unhappy.

"What's the deal with rabies?" asked Remus.

"Well, according to the report, it tests positive for rabies, but a DNA analysis shows some minor deviations in the genetic sequence. The HPA is terrified that this may be a different strain of the disease," Sir Robert said.

"What's rabies," Remus repeated a little louder this time.

Mildred turned to him. "Rabies is a disease that's transmitted by being bitten by an infected animal. Normally, we try to capture the animal to test it, or if that isn't possible, the victim undergoes a series of injections as a precaution. If the patient doesn't know they've been bitten, or they wait until the symptoms appear, it's invariably fatal."

Remus considered that for a moment, then he shrugged. "Lycanthropy or rabies, I knew it would kill me someday. I'm already years beyond the lifespan of a lycanthrope. Most werewolves are hunted down by wizards and killed. I was lucky enough to get some work in the muggle world. It helped feed and house me. I didn't need to turn feral, like so many others have done."

"That's ghastly!" exclaimed Mildred.

Remus shrugged. "You learn to live with it," he said with quiet dignity.

"Don't give up hope yet, my boy. I've put in a request to the PM's office to see if there are any wizards who have had normal medical

training. It's an odd situation, so if we find someone with medical training who also happens to be magical, maybe we can come up with some kind of treatment," Sir Robert said.

Remus smiled weakly. "I didn't really expect very much," he admitted.

Mildred squeezed his hand again. "You have to have hope," she said fervently.

Remus didn't want to discourage her, but he had lived with his condition since he was six years old and always knew it would eventually kill him. He smiled at her to ease her worry.

She held his hand for a moment longer, then she blushed slightly. "Remus, Wayne and I are going over the experimental protocols this morning. Would you like to join us? We could do with an extra mind, considering the problems we face."

His smile broadened. "I'd like that! Let me refill my cup and I'll walk you to the lab."

Campbeltown Weyr, June 3rd...

Harry walked into his office and turned on his computer. Unlike Remus, who seemed to be locked into a perpetual battle with the thing, he was slowly becoming more accustomed to the machine. His machine chimed and he smiled. Every morning he got email, usually from Hermione with a simple greeting. Sometimes May sent the same message. A few times he got messages from Luna that left him totally confused.

Luna's use of the computer had Harry baffled. While she claimed she wasn't responsible for it, the fact was that the internet message boards were awash with a warning about Nargle infestations. Harry believed Luna and suspected one of the non-magical riders of pulling a prank, but he had no proof either way.

The morning wasn't much different than any other, except that there was a message from Sir Robert asking him to come to Building Fifteen at nine. He glanced up at the clock and noted he had ten minutes, so he decided to walk the distance.

"I'm going to go see Sir Robert," he said to Chekiath.

"Comaloth has some new stories she's promising to tell today. Unless you need me, I'll wait here," Chekiath replied.

Harry grinned. Comaloth was repeating stories that Hermione had read. They were working on ways to bring books to the dragons but for now all they could do was listen in as their riders read. "Enjoy yourself, mate," he muttered in reply.

"I always do. You should listen in sometime. Hermione really likes the bodice ripping parts. You could try that with her."

Harry blushed and shook his head. "Yeah, that will go over wonderfully," he murmured to himself, then he turned and left the office. He made another mental note to find out what a bodice was. Whatever it was, he was now certain that asking Sirius would be a big mistake.

He was also certain that any ripping of a bodice used by Hermione would result in much pain for him.

Chekiath rumbled with laughter at his departing rider. All the dragons enjoyed teasing their riders about sex, since it seemed to bother them so much. Well, most dragons. Luna's Trandieth discovered early on that nothing really bothered her rider.

Building Fifteen was the main office building used by the scientists working under Sir Robert. As such, it was at the far north west corner of the Weyr. Soon he would need to pass through a fence to reach that area.

Harry paused in his walk to watch Wing Three go airborne. They were continuing the census that they had started. According to Draco, they only have a few more Weyrs to visit, Harry thought, then he sighed and wished he could go with them. Some days it seemed like he was literally tied to the Weyr.

He nodded in approval at the new formation they were using. The tail dragons on each limb of the 'V' were situated one hundred feet higher than the rest of the wing. The idea was to always have two dragons that were not too close to the group, in case the wing ran into trouble.

It made for a trickier formation, but all of the Wings had been practicing it. It was one of the changes put in place after Draco's wing was attacked. Generally, the two tail riders would provide overhead patrol whenever the Wing was out on Weyr business.

He stepped into the building and was immediately struck by the atmosphere. There was something about these scientist types that made them seem to be always excited about something. Sir Robert was a perfect example of such one person who could transfer his excitement to others without realizing what he was doing. The building literally reeked of it as Sir Robert's staff hustled about their business.

Currently, Sir Robert had forty people working for him at the Weyr and he had admitted to Harry that there were hundreds around the country working on pieces without knowing about dragons or magic. He turned right from the reception area after waving at the secretary there. She nodded and waved back. Like every other person on Sir Robert's staff, she had met with the dragons and had been briefed about them. She was part of Sir Robert's original staff and held one of the highest security clearances available.

"He's in his office," she called after him.

He chuckled and waved again. When he'd first met her she'd tried to hook him up with her granddaughter, much to his horror. It was the one of the few times he found the need to maintain secrecy a convenient excuse.

He stopped at the closed door and knocked.

"Come in!"

He stepped inside and smiled at Sir Robert, who sat behind his desk.

"Ah, Harry! Excellent! Excellent! I have someone I want you to meet."

Sir Robert's office looked as though a printer's office had exploded. There were stacks of papers everywhere. One wall had a floor to ceiling shelf and another had a white board that was covered in

equations that gave Harry a headache just to look at. May still tutored Harry in math and he was pretty good at it, but he recognized maybe one symbol in ten on that board.

He arched an eyebrow at Sir Robert, then looked around pointedly. There was no one else in the room but Harry and Sir Robert.

The older man grinned and waved him to a seat. "Oh, he'll be here in a moment, Captain Atkins is reviewing security protocols with him," said the old man, then he passed a file over to Harry.

Curiously, he flipped it open. "Doctor Issac Shepard?"

"You were looking for someone to man our infirmary. After I got the results from Remus' blood tests, I thought I'd ask, via the PM's office, if they'd found a wizard with normal medical training."

Harry jerked up from looking over the file. "What? His results? What were they?"

"Harry," Sir Robert said guardedly, "that sort of thing is private."

He sagged in his chair. "If it were good news, you wouldn't be so reluctant."

Sir Robert blinked and slowly nodded. "I'm sorry, Harry. I know how much Remus means to you. I don't think you should give up hope yet. One of the reasons I asked for Doctor Shepard is because he's a wizard trained as a medical doctor. He might be able to combine healing and science to help him."

Harry nodded unhappily.

"Look at it this way, my boy. Remus just continues on as he has for now. If we're lucky, Doctor Shepard might have some ideas we can try to make Remus' life easier."

He sighed, but nodded in understanding.

The door opened before he could comment and Katherine, Sirius and a man Harry presumed to be Shepard walked into the room. He was a short heavysset man with a neatly trimmed goatee, heavily peppered with gray.

"Sir Robert, Weyrleader, this is Doctor Shepard," Katherine said. "He's been briefed on the security issues and about dragons."

Shepard nodded, "Yes, the Captain and Mr. Black were quite thorough."

"Before I leave him in your hands, I have one important issue to bring up," Katherine said seriously.

"And what would that be, my dear?" asked Sir Robert.

"I received a notice from the Ministry of Defense last night. The Americans have sent a warning that they expect renewed Chinese interest in what their man was doing at the time of his capture. Now that he's been formally charged with espionage, we can expect the Chinese to trace his footsteps to our side of the pond. I know Sirius obliterated the man of all knowledge about the dragons, but he will remember a British installation on the Scottish coast. It isn't much, but the Chinese Ministry for State Security is not known for being incompetent," she said in conclusion.

Harry scowled and turned to Sirius, who was effectively in charge of all magical and dragon based security measures for the Weyr. "Speak to the Wing Seconds. I want a rider on every patrol shift. I know we've been skipping the midnight to 6am shift, so let's fix that. Break it into two hour shifts if you have to."

"I'll take care of it, Harry. Don't worry," Sirius replied.

"I have a request in with the MOD to see if we can get a couple satellite images of the Weyr. I want to know if the dragons can be spotted with that technology," Katherine offered.

Harry nodded and the two adults walked out of the room, leaving a stunned Shepard staring at Harry.

Sir Robert chuckled. "Doctor, for all intents and purposes, our Harry is the leader of a nation. Here at the Weyr, he's pretty much in charge of everything, especially if it deals with the dragons."

Harry looked embarrassed. "It's not like I asked for this," he muttered.

Sir Robert cackled with laughter. "No, lad, you certainly didn't and it's not in your nature to do so. But you're still handling it very well," he said, then he turned to Shepard. "Doctor, if you'll come with me, I'll introduce you to Lord Mills. He's the man who currently holds the purse strings around here until Harry takes over."

"And why would I need to know him?" asked Sheppard, his tone wary.

Harry stood and turned to face him. "Our infirmary is very primitive, Doctor. It's little more than a first aid station and we need to change that. We've brought in Madam Pomfrey from Hogwarts on a few occasions, but each time we do, we risk the wizards finding us and we risk Madam Pomfrey. What we need you to do is help us put together a small clinic that can respond to injuries, magical or mundane. I have several people who would be willing to train under you. Some of them will probably go on to medical school, or try to learn to be a healer as a self study," he said, then he frowned. "The healer apprenticeships really won't work with any of our riders."

"And when you're not busy, which will be fairly often after the clinic is stocked, there's a special project I'd like to talk to you about. Since the founding of the Weyr, we've only had a few emergency cases, but those that we have had highlighted the need to bring in someone to help us," added Sir Robert.

Harry shot him a curious glance and Sir Robert nodded with a smile. Sir Robert would brief Shepard on Remus' condition and ask him to look into it.

"Weyrleader, Ronan wants to double check with you about assigning people to the late night Weyr patrol," Garanoth said.

Sheppard gasped and touched his head lightly. It was one thing to be told about dragon speech, it was something entirely different to actually experience it.

Harry paused and glanced toward Hangar Two where Garanoth was currently waiting for Ronan to finish talking with Sirius. "Tell Ronan to put me down for part of tonight's patrol, Garanoth. If I'm going to insist on doing this, I need to participate," he replied silently.

"Yes, Weyrleader."

Harry looked back to see Shepard staring at him in astonishment.

"Astounding!" he exclaimed, "True telepathic communications."

"Dragons can't form speech like we humans do," offered Sir Robert. "They lack a proper voice box and their jaw and tongue aren't properly shaped for it."

"May has a book on dragon anatomy, if you're interested," added Harry. "It's not very good I'm afraid. Most of the organs are named, but their functions are largely ignored in favor of highlighting what potions they can be used to create."

The three of them walked slowly along one of the taxiways while Harry pointed out various structures to their new Doctor. "I'll introduce you to the riders tonight at dinner. I know you'll want to get medical records on people, but some of us simply don't have any."

"It would help if I could give everyone at least a basic physical," Shepard said.

Harry nodded. "The only one that might give you trouble would be Hagrid," he murmured.

Sir Robert looked up sharply. "Hagrid? Why? He strikes me as a most congenial sort of person."

Harry chuckled. "Oh, he is the very best, Sir Robert, but Hagrid is only partially human. His skin is nearly as tough as dragonhide. You'll probably destroy any needle you use to draw blood from him."

Sir Robert blinked. "Oh, I hadn't considered that. But still, he's a very unique person."

Harry smiled and thought of his first friend. "That he is, Sir Robert. That he is."

Doctor Shepard walked silently next to the two and wondered just what he had gotten himself involved in.

Harry's office, Campbeltown Weyr, June 5th...

Harry waited until all of the Wing leaders and their seconds filtered into the room and took a seat before starting the meeting.

"Thank you all for coming. I'm going to make some changes that will go into place immediately and continue for the foreseeable future. I want us to double the number of hours we spend training each week. Specifically, I want to see more bow training from dragonback and more flight coordination training," Harry said quietly.

"It sounds like you're expecting trouble," Ronan said, surprised.

"I am. I have been doing some checking and found that a third of the past goblin conflicts have started on a goblin holiday. Turns out that there is a goblin holiday later this month. Polenth has spoken to Ragnok and passed along a warning from me, but it's not enough. I want to make sure we're capable of doing our part."

"When is the holiday?" asked Hermione.

"June twenty first," Harry said softly.

"That's not much time," Draco commented.

"Agreed, but we all know how predictable the wizards can be," Harry replied.

Draco and Hermione both nodded but the others looked dubious.

"Look at it this way. If I'm wrong, all we've done is trained ourselves to be better shots. If I'm right, we've prepared for what's coming."

"Well," Ronan said, "we're doing pretty well on the jump coordination. Especially after we learned our dragons have a better sense of distance and location than we do! I hate to think what it would be like if we have to rely on binoculars for that."

Everyone nodded in agreement. It had come as a surprise to the riders that they could point to a location and tell their dragon they want to be two hundred feet over the spot, facing in a particular direction and the dragon could make the jump. Between. Sir Robert explained that it had to do with the dragons' inherent sense of

location. They seemed to intrinsically know where they were on the planet at all times.

The dragons were very amused at their rider's amazement.

"Shooting could be better, but it's not bad, according to Sargent Nichols," Ronan continued. "In Wing One, we have only one person who's sub par on shooting."

Harry held up a hand. "Let me guess. May McNulty?" he said unhappily. He had been on the range at the same time as May on several occasions and knew she was afraid of the bow. She cringed and closed her eyes every time she squeezed the trigger. It didn't help that her hands shook as she fired.

Ronan looked up from his notes and nodded. "Nichols said there's always someone in an outfit that can't hit the broadside of a barn. May is our someone. If she doesn't improve, I think we should cut her from the wing."

Harry winced. Cutting her from the active wings would leave them short a person. They already had one rider who wasn't part of a Wing. He didn't want to add May into that.

"No," Harry said firmly. "We can't afford to lose a rider simply because she's a bad shot. What I want to do is break the wings down into pairs. Each pair will look out for themselves and their wing-rider. I know the wings are odd numbered right now, so the Wing leaders will be alone, unless the Second is willing to keep an eye on two people instead of one."

"I've got your back, Harry," Ronan said firmly.

Draco and Marty glanced over at their Seconds, who nodded to them as well.

Satisfied that he had covered that topic, he turned to Draco. "I understand you hit the last Weyr yesterday?"

When Draco grinned, Harry was a bit shocked at his expression.

"It was beautiful Harry," Draco said.

Michelle nodded emphatically. "It was probably one of the most perfect Weyrs I've ever seen. Aogashima was gorgeous. It's a volcanic island with a lush forest. The dragons have a number of nearby islands that the wizards took over and hid from the muggles to forage at."

"Sounds great, but I'm more interested in the results of the census," Harry said to Michelle.

She blushed and Draco snickered at her reaction. "Well, I don't have the Weyr book complete yet, but if you want I can give some hard facts right now."

Seeing him nod, she pulled a book from her bag. "Counting the Hatching Weyr at Disko Island, there are a total of thirty six Weyrs world wide. With only thirty five occupied full time, we average two hundred and forty seven dragons per Weyr, giving us a total population lower than we originally thought."

"What's the total population then?" asked Hermione excitedly.

Michelle reached into her bag again and pulled out a pocket calculator. She tapped a few keys and smiled. "World wide, we have eight thousand six hundred and sixty seven dragons."

Harry leaned back in his chair and considered the number for a moment. "It's lower than we thought, but it's still big enough."

"Harry?" asked Ronan.

He glanced up and grinned. "Sir Robert and I were talking about the dragon population. He was thinking that the planet might be able to support twenty to twenty five thousand riders eventually. So we have room to grow, but we need to do this carefully and plan everything."

He glanced around and grinned. "I know, I know. We're sitting here hiding and talking about stuff that won't be seen for decades yet, but it's nice to dream. And I do see a day when a dragon rider will be welcome nearly anywhere."

Everyone glanced around with a grin. They were easily caught up in Harry's vision of what the future held.

Harry shook his head to clear his thoughts. Glancing down at his list, he crossed out several entries. "Finally, Doctor Shepard expects to be ready in the infirmary in a week. He's waiting on a bunch of things he ordered. He told me that once they arrive he's going to start giving physicals to all Weyr personnel so he'll know where we all stand."

Hermione grinned broadly at him. She and Katie had been among the first to volunteer as doctor's aides in the infirmary. Both were hoping that they could go on to become the healers for the Weyr riders and other personnel. "Good," she said. "I have you down for the first appointment."

Harry glanced up in surprise, then grimaced. That was one appointment he wasn't looking forward to.

"You always say you want to set a good example for your riders," Chekiath announced.

Harry groaned and buried his face into his hands. His dragon seemed to know exactly what to say and when to say it, usually with great effect.

Transfiguration Office, Hogwarts, June 10th...

Minerva sat in her chair tiredly and gave a sigh of relief. The year was finally over and she had just watched the last student leave. She was disappointed with herself. Despite her best efforts, she felt that only a few of the graduating class had changed their mind about joining the WDF. By her reckoning, at least twenty two were still planning on joining.

Her other concern, Neville Longbottom, had been addressed when Arthur Weasley personally picked him up at school. He took the lad to the edge of the wards and apparated him home. Neville skipped the train entirely, but now he was safe behind the family wards, which had been beefed up by a private warding company. Everyone breathed a sigh of relief now that Neville was behind newly rebuilt wards with his great Uncle Algie.

There was a quick knock at her door, then it opened and closed quickly.

In a flash, she had her wand out and pointing unerringly at an invisible presence. "Alejandro?"

He shimmered into view and gave her a slight smile. "I thought knocking would be a better way of announcing my presence."

"It is," she replied tightly, her wand never wavering.

He smirked at her. "Minnie, you can relax. I gave up trying to oblivate you years ago. After about ten years I realized you weren't going to reveal any department secrets to anyone. Besides, I'm here to do you a favor."

Her hand holding the wand relaxed a little, although it never changed direction. "A favor?"

He reached towards his robe and her wand was instantly pointing at his head. "Move nice and slow, Alejandro. I would really hate to transfigure your head into a block of marble, although it might be an improvement."

He grinned and carefully reached into his robe and pulled out a scroll, which he casually tossed on her desk. "You know I have several listening charms around various Ministry offices. This is a transcript from Fudge's office for yesterday's meeting with the new Head of the WDF."

Minerva looked at him sharply. "Umbridge has been sacked? Who's in control?"

Croaker chuckled. "I wasn't sure of it until recently but I'm now convinced that good old Cornelius has fooled us all. He used Umbridge to eliminate his competition, then he stomped down hard on her. It wasn't until last week that I was certain that Cornelius was acting on his own. Can you believe the silly fool thinks that if he can get the dragons from the goblins, the wizards will grant him overlordship over all of Britain?"

"He's insane!" exclaimed Minerva.

"Perhaps, but considering the people in this country, I could see them giving up their rights like that. No, I don't think he's insane, I think he's drunk on his own sense of power and importance,"

countered Croaker. "And, like it or not, I believe he's correctly read what the wizarding public would do if he could accomplish what he plans. If anything, his flaw lies in believing he can really conquer the goblins."

Minerva nodded slowly. "It makes sense. I remember Cornelius from when I first started teaching here. He was a seventh year and he was rather smart. Not very talented magically, but pretty smart. I always wondered where those brains went to after he was elected Minister."

She reached out with her free hand and touched the scroll. "And this?"

"It's a copy of a conversation between Fudge and Thompson, the new WDF Head. He was upset that you managed to dissuade so many students from joining at year end. Fudge has authorized him to deal with you, after they've dealt with the goblins. He didn't mention a date, but from the sound of it, I assume it's soon. Minerva, they're going to try to kill you, probably when you're out of the castle and away from the protection of the wards."

"Your concern seems somewhat out of place, Alejandro. I seem to recall you sending four different agents after me when I resigned and refused to allow you to oblivate me. You had my oaths. The oblivation was unnecessary. Now you're suddenly concerned for my well being?" she replied somewhat acidly.

Croaker looked embarrassed. "Those were different times and I do deeply regret my actions. I should have known that you would keep your oaths, but I was new in the position and determined to do things by the book."

She gave him a steady glare. His 'by the book' attitude was what had resulted in their breakup and her leaving the department.

"Fine, fine! You were right and I was wrong," he said grumpily. "My question is, what are you going to do about that?" He pointed to the scroll.

She frowned, considering her options. The only safe place for her was the school, but she couldn't spend all her time here. Doing so would mean being a prisoner of the Ministry, even if the

accommodations were much nicer than anything the Ministry would offer.

"Minnie," Croaker said carefully, "if I could arrange for you to join Albus, would you go?"

Croaker wasn't exactly a welcome presence at the Weyr, but he thought he had enough pull to wangle an invitation for her to spend some time there. He and Potter had opposing viewpoints in regard to Wizarding society and had exchanged some rather pointed words over the topic in recent days.

Harry was ambivalent to the plight of the wizards and cared little about the fact that rebuilding things would be a difficult task. It irritated Croaker immensely. Here was a powerful wizard who had the potential to exceed Dumbledore himself, but who cared nothing for magic or wizarding culture. It was absolutely infuriating!

It had come to the attention of most of the adult wizards that Harry wasn't really interested in learning more about magic and he openly rejected the idea of ever taking his O.W.L.s or N.E.W.T.s. As far as he was concerned, as long as he'd learned enough so that he was not a danger to himself or others, that was good enough for him.

Harry was firmly convinced that the key to dragon survival lay in the muggle world and he was embracing that for all he was worth. More disturbing was the fact that several of the wizard students were following Harry's footsteps. Not all, but enough to seriously trouble Croaker.

Minerva leaned back in her chair and pondered that. "I suppose I could for a while. But my obligation remains to the school."

Croaker nodded in satisfaction. "That's good enough. I'll ask. I might still get a no but I don't think so."

Croaker moved to the door and then cast a disillusion charm on himself. He faded from view, then the door opened and closed.

Minerva waited another minute before relaxing and putting away her wand. She slumped back in her chair and reached for the scroll he had left behind. Obviously he wanted her to read it.

Campbeltown Infirmary, June 14th...

After receiving three different reminders about his morning appointment from the dragons, Harry reluctantly stepped into the building that Doctor Shepard was turning into a real clinic. Corporal Stone was his principle helper and nurse, but several of the girls were helping organize the office and had started to learn the basics of running a medical office.

"Harry, good morning," Shepard said with a smile as he entered the brand new examination room. "Since I couldn't get any medical history on you, I need you to fill out some forms." He placed a clipboard with the forms on the bed, then dropped a pen on top. "Someone will be in to collect them. I'll be back in ten minutes." With another quick smile, he left the room.

Picking up the clipboard, Harry looked down at the complex looking forms and sighed, then he started in on it. Many of the questions stumped him. He honestly couldn't recall having ever been vaccinated, nor did he know anything about his family's medical history.

After ten minutes, Hermione entered the room and took the clipboard from Harry. She frowned at all the blank spots and left the room. A minute later, Shepard entered the room with the clipboard in his hands. He was scowling.

"Harry," he said. "you left an awful lot blank on this."

Harry shrugged. "You asked questions I don't have an answer to."

Shepard gave him a reassuring smile. "Let's try it this way. Did you ever visit the doctor when you were growing up? Or go to the school nurse to get some shots?"

Harry shook his head and stared at the floor. "My relatives never took me to a doctor. All the notes and stuff from the doctors office were photocopied from my cousin's forms and then altered by Vernon. He said it wasn't worth spending the money on me."

Shepard sighed, knowing there was a lot here that wasn't being said. "All right, Harry, let's get you up on the scale and check your weight and height. I can't do it today, but I'm afraid you're in for a bunch of

shots sometime real soon. If you can't remember being vaccinated, we'll have to assume you never were and do the full series."

As Harry hopped down off the table and stepped onto the scale, Shepard scribbled a quick order for a complete workup.

Two hours later, Harry walked into the main administration building feeling thoroughly poked and prodded. He had another appointment with Shepard next week for vaccinations. Wizards rarely caught the same diseases as muggles, but some of the childhood illnesses were right up at the top of that short list.

Sheppard had been frustrated by Harry's reluctance to speak about some scarring on his body. He had to remind Harry that he was required by law not to tell others. After that, Harry had admitted that they were caused by Vernon when he was younger and that was all he would say. Sheppard didn't push, but he saw scars that looked to be caused by a belt or a rope. He filed that away, along with all the other information he was collecting on Harry.

Harry paused when he heard his name being called and he glanced into the office to spot Albus Dumbledore, Sirius Black and Minerva McGonagall sitting around drinking tea.

Entering the office, he grinned as his former Head of House. "Professor, when I heard that the Ministry would be looking for you, I couldn't stand back and do nothing. I'm glad you decided to join us."

Minerva ran an appraising eye over Harry, who she hadn't seen in a number of months. "You're looking very well, Mr. Potter. I daresay this life agrees with you."

"It has been a challenge," he murmured.

"And one that you've lived up to marvelously," Albus said with a grin.

Harry shrugged. "I try," he said weakly.

"Harry, why don't you show Minerva around for a bit? It'll be lunch soon. We can pick her up at the Kitchen Hall," Albus suggested.

Harry looked surprised, then he nodded. "I'll take her over to Hangar Two, and maybe visit with Hagrid."

Minerva shot Albus a glance and he nodded to her, then she stood and followed Harry out. They hadn't gone far from the administration building when Minerva stopped him.

"Professor?"

"Harry, I'm told that you've been letting your studies slack off some," she said. She seemed uncomfortable using his given name.

Harry looked down and scuffed a foot along the path nervously. "There's only so much time in my days, Professor. And the key to the dragons future lies with the muggles."

"That's true, but the key to your future must include magic, Harry. You can deny being part of the British magical society, and I hardly blame you for it, but you cannot deny being a magical being," she replied, then she slowly started walking along the path. "One of the reasons why Hogwarts does not teach muggle subjects is that there is so much that must be taught to discipline the minds of young wizards. I can understand you're feeling torn, but Albus is worried, rightly so, that by rejecting your roots, you're rejecting magic as well."

"I suppose," he replied softly. "But I don't know what to do about it. There's so much I need to learn."

He fell into step with her and they walked slowly towards Hangar two.

"I don't know how long I'm going to be here, but I would like to offer a compromise, if I can."

Harry glanced at her with interest. "Oh?"

Minerva shook her head. "I can't believe I'm going to suggest this, but drop every magical class but Charms and Transfiguration. Let Remus, Sirius, Albus and myself help you with those two classes only. History of magic is a waste of your time and Defense is merely an application of Charms and Transfiguration, with some hexes thrown in. Those same hexes could be incorporated into the Charms tutoring."

She paused and took a deep breath, "As loathe as I am to admit it, Sirius Black could have easily obtained his Mastery in Transfiguration. He'll be more than adequate to continue tutoring you when I return to Hogwarts."

Harry nodded. "Cutting down to two classes would be a big help," he admitted, then he sighed. They were close to the entrance of the Hangar and he turned to look around the Weyr. "There is so much, sometimes I just want to hide from it all."

She chuckled. "I'm sure you know that your father spent six years chasing your mother before she agreed to date him. And once she had agreed, he came to me and told me that now that they were dating, he was terrified he'd do something wrong."

Harry looked at her, curious. He hadn't heard the tale before.

"I was close friends with your father's family. I went to school with your grandmother, so it wasn't unusual for James to come to me at school with problems. Anyway, I told him that all he could do was be himself. While he occasionally made Lily very angry with him, he always tried his best for her and it was good enough. You can't help but to do the same, Mr. Potter. You are a melding of the best of your parents."

She paused and looked up in surprise as a flight of dragons flew over. They were followed by a dozen British Army helicopters. She turned and looked at Harry inquisitively.

"We've offered the goblins our help, should the WDF attack. The muggles made a similar offer. What you're seeing is the first of four familiarization sessions with the troops that we'll be bringing to Gringault. It wouldn't do to scare the troops to death and expect them to climb onto a dragon's back, so we're going to introduce them to the dragons, let them get to know them."

She smiled and shook her head at the marvel of it. Dragons working with muggles!

Harry turned and opened the door to the hangar and held it open for her. "This building is our main classroom area for magic and for working with the dragons. We usually hold morning classes here.

After lunch, we go to a set of buildings at the far end of the Weyr for classes in muggle subjects."

He led her past the large wall map of the world containing pins marking each Weyr. Then he led her into the main meeting area with its stage and room for dragons in the back.

Luna was in the large area with her dragon. She was surrounded by a bunch of riders, who were examining something on Trandieth.

The Hogwarts students seemed startled to discover that Minerva was there. Harry introduced her, then turned to Luna. "What's going on?"

"It's an idea that Michelle and I were working on," she said, then she pointed to her dragon. "After the accident that nearly unseated Michelle, she and I started looking around for ways to prevent that. A saddle seemed like a good idea, but we can't ask our dragons to wear a saddle."

All of the riders nodded in agreement. Luna looked at Harry and he motioned for her to continue.

"This harness lets the rider strap themselves securely to the dragon and doesn't impede the dragon's movement or breathing," she said, pointing to the harness.

He smiled apologetically to Minerva and she returned his smile.

He moved closer to inspect the harness, which looped around the tops of Trandieth's shoulders, then connected to a single loop around the neck. Attached to the harness was a belt that would allow the rider freedom of movement, but still hold him or her on the dragon. It was obvious where Michelle's contributions came from. The harness buckles looked to have been taken entirely from a car seat belt.

"Trandieth, please extend your wings," Harry said softly.

He watched the large Ironbelly extend out her wings to their fifty foot wingspan and he saw the harness didn't impede wing movement at all. "How does it feel, Trandieth?"

"At first it felt odd, Weyrleader, but I quickly got used to it. I would never let my Luna fall."

Harry smiled. "No, you wouldn't, but accidents happen, like what happened between Wivaronth and Garanoth. Would you allow Luna to use this harness?"

Trandieth turned her large head and looked at Luna, then turned to Harry. "If it would keep her safe while we hunt Snorkacks, I would."

Harry smiled and reached up to scratch the dragon's eye ridges. "You do your rider proud, Trandieth," he said, then he turned to where Luna and Michelle stood, both waiting anxiously.

"Have you checked that the cold of Between won't damage the harness?" he asked.

Both girls nodded.

"Michelle says is not cloth, but something called Nylon, which won't be as affected by cold like leather and rope might be. We have to make sure they don't get wet, but we care for our other equipment, why not this too?" replied Luna.

Harry eyed the harness again, then he smiled at the two girls.

"Talk to Lord Mills about what you'd need to make two hundred of these harnesses to start. We'll probably need to supply Maziang with their first set of harnesses, maybe the Yanks as well. Oh, and girls? Very well done," he said with a broad smile. The harnesses were a major improvement.

The riders had argued about the idea of some kind of saddle, but no one liked the idea of putting a saddle on their dragons. The saddle represented a subservient relationship in the minds of the riders and no one felt comfortable with that idea. The harness provided the extra safety without adding the demeaning aspect of a saddle.

Harry flipped open his list of things to do and added Luna and Michelle to the list as the next riders to receive an award for contributing to the Weyr. He then turned to Professor McGonagall.

"Professor, it's nearly lunch time. Let's head over to the Kitchen Hall. I know there are a number of your students who would love to talk with you again."

Minerva nodded and followed Harry, while Luna and Michelle started putting together their list of materials for making the harnesses.

Minerva walked quietly next to Harry, thinking hard about what she had just witnessed. The old Harry Potter would never have interacted like that with two attractive girls, nor would he have been so decisive. It just added to her confusion, because the old Harry had been very visible on their walk to the Hangar.

Lord Mill's Office, Campbeltown Weyr, June 14th...

James looked up when his office door opened and he was surprised to see their new doctor standing in the doorway. He hadn't had much of a chance to interact with the man before and was curious why he was here. Except for his first few days in the Weyr, when he was handing him requisition forms by the armload, they had very little interaction.

"Issac, come in," James said. "You caught me just as I was about to leave."

Shepard entered the room and sat down heavily in a chair across from James.

"Tough day?"

Issac looked at him sourly. "You give physicals to ten teens, plus suture one corporal who wasn't looking while he was jogging and ran into a post. Although I suppose it could be worse. My ER residency was a nightmare."

James nodded in sympathy. "So, what brings you down to my office? Is there something else you need to buy?"

James gestured to the forms in Issac's hands.

Issac grimaced and handed over a half dozen requisitions, "These are fairly important and if you place the orders tomorrow morning, they'll get here next week."

James looked down and frowned. The forms were for the purchase of pharmaceuticals, but they referenced catalog numbers and names he didn't recognize. "All right, I'll place these orders tomorrow. Is that it?"

"No, I'm afraid not," Issac said, then he gave James a hard look. "You know about patient/doctor confidentiality. I'm not supposed to bring this up to anyone except under specific circumstances. I had a few of these forms from my old posting, but I never thought I would need to use one here."

Issac handed a single form to James who looked at it in confusion. It was a report of suspicion of child abuse.

"Honestly, I'm not sure what to do with this. By law, I'm obliged to file this report. However, given the fact that everyone here is living under the onus of the official secrets act," Shepard said, trailing off.

"I notice you didn't name the individual," James said carefully.

Shepard shrugged. "Like I said, this form is supposed to be turned over to a trained specialist at a particular Ministry. I didn't want to give away too much."

James sighed and shook his head. "Harry?" he asked quietly.

Issac stared at the man in surprise. "You knew?"

"Knew for certain? No. Suspected is more like it. In fact, many of us suspected something like this, to be honest. He refuses to talk about his time with his relatives, and the few times that he does mention them, there's no warmth in his voice," James replied. "Just how bad are we talking about?"

Issac shook his head in dismay. "He's a bit underweight and a good four inches shorter than he should be for his age. As far as I can tell, he's never been given a vaccination. It's a miracle he didn't come down with something serious. Polio is making a comeback. Hell, German Measles at his age would be a disaster.

"Physically, I would say he's suffered bouts of malnutrition throughout his life. I can find little evidence of physical beatings, a

few very old bone breaks on his x-rays and some scars on his back that he admitted his Uncle caused, but wouldn't say how. I suspect at some point his magic interfered with a punishment and his relatives changed their tactics, withholding food instead of beating him and abusing him verbally.

"Mentally, Harry is a very closed off person. He will let you get close, but there are distinct limits that most people won't even notice unless you point it out to them. I suppose he's lucky, He survived with a minimum of damage to his person. However, legally, his relatives are still his guardians and there is a law I'm bound to follow."

James nodded. "How about this. I'm due to visit the Minister's office tomorrow. I can hand deliver this form and see if we can figure out what to do from there."

Issac smiled in relief, glad to be able to turn the problem over to someone who understood. "Oh, yes, one other thing."

James looked up. "Yes?"

"Emma Granger has informed me that by spring of next year there is a very good chance that all of the riders will be sexually active. Sometime before the end of the year, we need to make sure every girl gets a visit to an OB/GYN. It's a little out of my line of specialty."

James nodded and made a note to himself to see that something was arranged for that.

"Outside of the issues you mentioned, is there anything else?" James asked.

Shepard shook his head. "No, I think that covers it. We should consider at some point buying some of the equipment we have instead of leasing it but we're set for now."

James stood and Shepard followed his lead. "I'll pass off your report to someone who will do something about it and I won't mention this to anyone."

Shepard looked relieved. "Thank you, James."

#10 Downing Street, London, June 15th...

Alejandro Croaker, Albus Dumbledore and Lord Mills filed into an adjoining office which contained several very large screen monitors showing the Prime Minister's office from several angles. Another bank of monitors showed the outer office and the corridor leading up to it.

At one desk was a member of the Prime Minister's personal security detail. He was manning a radio, which broadcast to receivers worn by all of the security detail.

James took a seat and shook his head in amazement. This all felt like something from a James Bond movie.

"How much time before Cornelius shows up?" asked Albus.

Croaker gave him an amused look. "You know he's not going to show, don't you? And there's still five minutes until the appointment."

Albus nodded and sat next to James, then he looked up at the television screens. "Marvelous pictures and the color is astounding," he said softly.

"It's the new cameras we installed last year. Straight from Sony, the best the Japanese make," muttered the security man, then he leaned forward in his chair as a door opened in the corridor. "All units, go to alert two. Repeat alert two."

He flipped a switch and one of the blank monitors flared to life. The color image on the big screen showed one man who was not Cornelius. The new screen showed three red colored figures.

"We have three on the IR camera and only one on the visible camera," the security man said into his microphone.

With that announcement, a detail was already removing the Prime Minister from the building. The man and his companions would be led into the Prime Minister's office and told he had stepped out for a moment. Then the security detail would neutralize them.

"That is not Cornelius Fudge," Croaker said.

"No, it's not," agreed Dumbledore. "But I am surprised. It's John Dawlish, who I guess is now in charge of Fudge's bodyguards."

"Dawlish is a nasty dueler. When pressed, he is quite clever and his spells are designed to maximize damage to his opponent," Croaker said.

The security man nodded, then he turned back to his microphone. "Visible subject is considered dangerous. Make him a priority."

On the monitor, the Prime Minister's secretary opened the door to his office and told Dawlish that the Minister had stepped out and would return shortly. Dawlish smiled at the woman and she closed the door behind her.

As soon as the door closed, the security man in their room pressed a button, locking the door. "Go!" he said tensely over his microphone.

The scene on the monitor exploded into action. Dawlish was hit by two stunners and bound to the chair before he even knew what happened. His companions were felled by two more spells. As soon as they were down, Albus watched another door open and muggle security agents flood into the room with their weapons drawn.

"And that, ladies and gentlemen, is a successful take down," murmured the security agent.

"Yes, well done," agreed James.

Albus and Alejandro exchanged a disturbed look. They knew that the muggles were highly capable, but seeing it like this really drove home the point. They would be even more disturbed if they knew that three of the armed agents in the Prime Minister's office were wizards who preferred their Glock pistols to their wands.

The security agent turned to his guests. "The Prime Minister will meet with you in conference room two. It's going to take some time to process our prisoners, then you'll be able to witness their interrogation."

All three stood when the door opened and another agent beckoned them to follow.

Kitchen Hall, Campbeltown Weyr, June 15th...

Harry paused in the doorway and looked around in surprise. Another group of soldiers had arrived today for their orientation with the dragons and now were taking advantage of cuisine offered by the Weyr. Not that it was any different than what was available on any other army base around the country, but this was the first time they were really using the facility to capacity. He was surprised to note that all of the riders were clustered in one corner of the hall.

This was the second group of soldiers undergoing orientation, but unlike yesterday's group, they'd brought along some kitchen staff to help prepare meals. Until now, the Weyr had made do with two of Captain Atkins' detachment and two elves to prepare meals, but that just wasn't enough for three hundred people.

Shrugging to himself at the unusual arrangement, he filled his tray and made his way over to sit with his riders. He nodded as he passed some of the adults.

Hermione, Luna and Susan looked up and gave him a relieved smile when he sat down with them.

"Harry, I shouldn't complain, but some of these guys are a bit rough," Susan said shakily.

"In all fairness, Miss Bones, some of these soldiers aren't exactly the type you'd take to a grand ball," said Captain Atkins from behind her.

"Katherine, it's not what you think," Hermione protested. "One of these guys was... was..." She trailed off and blushed deeply.

Harry frowned and turned to Susan. "Was what?" he asked flatly.

Susan looked down at her plate. "He tried to grope me. It was all I could do to keep Nimonth from tearing him to pieces," she whispered, then shuddered as a wave of shame engulf her. Nothing like this happened to her before.

Harry's face darkened further. "Who?"

Surprised by the authority in Harry's voice, she pointed a shaky finger at a burly corporal sitting at the end of one table, laughing with his mates.

Harry stood up angrily. "Cheki, Nimonth, meet me outside the Kitchen Hall," he sent.

"Yes, Harry."

"Yes, Weyrleader."

Harry reached down and grabbed Susan's hand. "Come with me," he ordered, then he turned and pulled her from her chair as he made his way over to where the soldier sat.

She squeaked in surprise and all of the riders at her table stood to follow her.

Harry walked over the man and looked down at him. "Unless you want to spend the rest of your life living in this hall, you will come with me now, asshole."

The man didn't know it, but if he refused to follow, Harry would set a round the clock dragon watch on the building, with orders to grab him when he exited the Kitchen Hall.

Susan blinked in shock and looked at Harry fearfully. The man was a good foot taller than him. He was a monster compared to Harry, but somehow she knew he wasn't going to fight him.

Alerted to the problem now, the whole hall fell into silence and all eyes turned to watch what was happening. The wizards in the crowd knew that Harry was very upset just by the magic that was swirling around him, but unlike before, this time it was tightly controlled and focused.

The burly man blinked in surprise and his table mates looked at the corporal with eager anticipation. He eyed Harry, who was at least eight inches shorter than him and noted he was holding Susan's hand. "Oh, so you think you're going to protect your little girlie? A runt like you?"

"Outside," Harry repeated through gritted teeth.

The man stood and looked down at Harry and smiled mirthlessly. "I'm going to enjoy pounding you into the dirt. Maybe your girlfriend will see that you're just a useless runt and reconsider my very generous offer."

Many at his table laughed. They all stood up and followed Harry and the corporal out of the Kitchen Hall.

Harry pulled Susan out of the hall into the space between the buildings and told her not to move for a moment. Turning around, he watched the corporal exit the building and stop. His friends ranged out behind him, laughing at the beating about to come.

Harry took several steps forward, then stopped, spread his legs slightly and crossed his arms over his chest. He looked at the large man with utter contempt.

Seeing his expression, the corporal began rolling up his sleeves and walking toward Harry. "I'm going to enjoy this, boy. I'm going to stomp a mudhole in your ass, then fuck your little girlfriend while you watch," he growled.

Harry didn't say a word, he simply smiled.

A single wing-beat was the only warning as Chekiath swooped down, grabbed the corporal, then disappeared.

Nimonth landed next to Susan and the young woman followed the instructions Harry was giving her dragon.

Harry turned to face the assembled soldiers who were staring at him incredulously, afraid to speak.

Nearly a full minute passed before Chekiath returned to gently place the corporal in front of Harry. The man was shivering violently and covered in ice from his head to his feet. His teeth chattered loudly and he stumbled away from the dragon who loomed above him, growling.

Chekiath moved slowly to stand behind Harry as the soldiers tracked the huge dragon with their eyes. Each of his steps caused the ground to tremble. Chekiath was sixty six feet long with a wingspan

approaching one hundred feet. He had finally passed beyond the category of Imperial Horntail.

"The next man who doesn't treat my riders with the respect they deserve will receive a harsher treatment than being dunked in the ocean. If one of my riders is rude, you may come to tell me about it and I will deal with it. But never forget that you are here at my invitation. This is my Weyr and these are my riders and dragons," Harry said flatly.

Harry looked at the shivering soldier. "You assaulted one of my riders, an underage girl, at that. If this place and what we're doing here weren't a state secret, I'd insist on your being arrested. For your information, you owe her your life. Her dragon was ready to tear you to pieces. You foolishly decided to grope a girl who has a forty five foot long dragon as a life mate. Had she not convinced her dragon otherwise, you would have died today.

"Consider yourself lucky. I could have let her dragon take you swimming, but she would have left you to drown."

Nimonth growled ominously and smoke wafted up from her nostrils. Her eyes were spinning rapidly and flashing a deep red. Like all of the other bonded Horntails, Nimonth was approaching fifty feet in length and weighed in a seven and a half tons when she wasn't controlling her weight. "I can still do that," Nimonth said so everyone could hear her.

He turned to Captain Atkins, who stood next to Sirius, watching the whole spectacle in astonishment. "Get him out of my Weyr, Captain," he growled, "before I let Nimonth have her way with him." He turned back to Susan. "Are you all right?"

He stepped closer and spoke in a soft voice. "You did nothing wrong, Sue. Never be afraid to come to me if this sort of thing happens."

Susan shivered and nodded weakly as several of the other girls stepped forward, taking her hands or patting her back. "She'll be fine," Luna said, wrapping her arm around Susan's shoulders. None of the girls ever expected this kind of reaction from Harry.

Harry nodded and gave Susan a smile before heading back into the Kitchen Hall. The soldiers respectfully parted, making a hole for him to reenter the hall.

Once he sat back down, he dug into his lunch and pulled out his list of things to do, adding a few entries.

"Harry?"

He looked up to see Susan sitting across from him once more.

"Thank you," she said a bit shyly.

He shook his head. "You don't need to thank me. I would have done the same for any one of you. What he did was wrong."

"Harry, what were you thinking? He could have killed you!" exclaimed Hermione.

Harry smiled. "He could have forced me to use magic, but I doubt that. I grew up with his type, Hermione. A bully likes an audience. By demanding he go outside, he knew he'd have a bigger crowd to watch him in action. What he didn't count on was our dragons."

He shrugged. "If he tried something in the hall I would have pulled my wand, but I didn't think he would."

He paused and looked up at Sirius, who was standing, waiting for a break in the conversation. "Katherine is taking Corporal Willard to the base brig for now. She's going to file a report with his Commanding Officer," Sirius said, then he grinned. "Dunking in the ocean followed by a trip Between? We're going to have to try that on Remus!"

Harry grinned at his godfather. "If you can convince Norendrath, fine, but leave me out of your prank wars. Last time I got involved in one of those, Remus vanished all my boxers! I had to go for nearly a week before I could buy more!"

He blinked and suddenly blushed as he realized what he had said in front of the girls. They were now staring him rather fiercely.

Sirius laughed and walked away, shaking his head. He didn't need to involve Harry in any pranks, as Harry had a tendency to get into trouble all by himself.

#10 Downing Street, London, June 15th...

The phone rang and Prime Minister Major picked it up. He listened for a moment, then he placed the receiver back on the hook and stood. "They are ready for us downstairs," he said softly.

The Prime Minister led them down a series of stairways into a subbasement that didn't appear on any blueprints. Then he stopped and turned to Dumbledore and Croaker.

"One of the security agents will take you to the prisoners. Lord Mills and I will watch from an adjoining room, via a concealed television camera. There will be two other security agents in the room with you for your protection. I wish we could take advantage of your version of truth serum, but I'm afraid that, without a court order, we can't use it," he said.

Croaker and Dumbledore nodded and let themselves be led into one room, while the Prime Minister and Lord Mills entered another.

John Dawlish looked up and his jaw dropped open when Dumbledore and Croaker walked into the room.

"Before you get your hopes up, John, the muggles are the ones in charge here. They know that you came here under false pretenses and are not happy with the situation," Dumbledore said.

Croaker nodded and sat across from Dawlish. "There are a number of charges against you, Dawlish," he said. "And I've been told you'll be given a very fair trial in Her Majesty's courts. The plan right now is to offer you Veritaserum during your trial. You might want to consider taking them up on the offer because refusing will look very bad for you in the eyes of the court."

"But I'm a wizard. They can't try me!" protested Dawlish.

Albus looked at him and couldn't suppress the twinkle in his eye. "I don't see a wand in your hand. Without one, you're no different than

any other criminal in the courts, except that most muggles aren't charged with high treason."

Dawlish paled dramatically and jerked as if stung. "You can't do this to me," he protested. "I'm working for the Ministry of Magic!"

Albus sighed. "John, I'm afraid you're a little behind the times. Her Majesty's government is fully aware of what the Ministry of Magic has been doing and is taking steps to correct the situation. You see, the Ministry operates at the will of the Queen."

Dawlish looked to the other two men who looked like muggles. He would find no hope from them and would be appalled to discover they were actually wizards.

Croaker pulled out a long sheet of parchment and glanced at it, then he set up a dicto-quill on a stack of blank paper. "I have some questions for you, mostly things I would like you to confirm. I'm pretty sure of the answers, Mr. Dawlish, I just want your confirmation."

In a nearby room, Lord Mills turned down the volume on a television set and turned to the Prime Minister, who looked at him strangely. "Sir, I'm sorry, but while I have you alone I have one issue I promised I would bring up."

His curiosity peaked, Major nodded. He wondered what issue the Weyr had driven forward this time. "Oh?"

"You are aware of the doctor your office found for us?"

"Yes. How's he working out?"

James smiled. "Doctor Shepard is a wonderful addition to the Weyr. He's been giving each of the riders and other people at the Weyr physicals and setting up a small clinic. He even broached the possibility of moving his family to the Weyr."

Major nodded with a sense of relief. They would have been hard pressed to find another wizard who had trained as a doctor. Thus far, they'd found exactly four people in the medical fields who were wizards, and only two of them were licensed doctors.

James produced a single form, which he handed to the Prime Minister. "This, sir, is the problem. We don't know what to do with it."

Major glanced down and started to frown as he understood what he was looking at. It was a form detailing suspected child abuse for one Harry James Potter. It went on to detail old injuries and frequent bouts of malnutrition that had been as recent as the previous summer from the Doctor's estimate.

"Harry doesn't talk about his life growing up," James added quietly, "but a number of us suspected something along these lines. Until now, there was little anyone could do, but Doctor Shepard is bound by law to report this. We hoped that you would know how to handle it."

"The Queen's investigation in the Weyrleader's home life suggested this would be the case," Major admitted. "That was only a cursory look into his life and I will say Her Majesty was most unhappy with what she learned. Now this? Well, I'll see this is passed to the appropriate people with orders to keep source information classified."

James nodded and looked relieved.

"Does the Weyrleader know about this?"

James shook his head. "No. Like I said, he's been reluctant to talk about his life with his relatives. I'm sure he knows that Doctor Shepard is aware of it, but I don't think he knows what will happen to that information."

Major looked thoughtful, then he gestured to the television monitor. "We're pretty sure the WDF will attack the goblins on the twenty first of this month."

"Harry agrees. He's had the Weyr practicing combat maneuvers since the beginning of the month," James said.

Major looked surprised. "Has he now? I wonder how he figured out the date? We only learned of it from Croaker last week."

"According to Harry, the wizards kick off one of these little wars on a goblin holiday roughly one third of the time. And as it happens, there's a major holiday this month," James said.

Major smiled and shook his head. "He may be a teenager, but he's got a head on his shoulders. Lord Kennewick's people were considering the same time frame and Croaker confirmed it."

"The Weyrleader knows his limitations, Prime Minister, but he fully intends for the Weyr to do their part," James said softly.

Major looked the Mills sharply and James shrugged. He had witnessed first hand the training Harry was putting himself and his dragons through. He had watched as he patiently worked with May until she could shoot her bow and not flinch every time.

"I'm curious now. Just what role does he envision?" Major asked in concern. He was worried that Harry was treating this like some great adventure.

James smiled at his Prime Minister. "You can relax. I don't think he's planning anything for you to worry about. He's going to tap several other Weyrs to provide enough dragons to move your forces into Gringault in a single pass. That will also give him enough dragons to evacuate the children and other goblins to Disko Island. After those things are accomplished, I suspect he might go to Diagon Alley to keep the wizards from reinforcing their assault on Gringotts."

Major nodded thoughtfully and looked relieved. "He really is trying to protect his riders and dragons then. I feared he might do something rash."

"I think," James said slowly, "that we've all forgotten one critical factor when dealing with the riders, sir."

"Eh? What factor?"

"The dragons themselves. Not a single one of these young riders acts like a impetuous teenager. I firmly believe the dragons are having a major impact on them, forcing them to mature much quicker than usual. Harry is a young teen, but he acts like he's in his mid twenties most of the time. In fact, the only time I see a true

childish behavior from him is when he indulges in a hobby one of his riders introduced him to."

Major looked interested and James smiled. "It's amusing, really. Here he is with a flying dragon who can take him anywhere in the world in seconds and he finds delight in learning to fly a radio controlled model plane. He's not very good at it either, but he bought a model that was designed to crash a lot. In fact, several of the boys have joined in, forming a little club, so to speak."

"I'm glad to hear that," Major replied. "Even I take time off and indulge in a hobby or two."

Both men looked up to see Croaker and Dumbledore exiting the room, their interview apparently over.

They met in the hall and paused to talk. "How did it go?" asked Prime Minister Major.

"Well enough. According to your agents, one of the men was released with the Queen's message to the Minister. I think they will do one of two things. They will either ignore it, or they will try an attack either here or try for the Queen herself," Dumbledore replied unhappily.

Major gave piercing look. "You don't like releasing him?"

Dumbledore shared a look with Croaker, who sighed and gestured for the old man to speak.

"We are of divided opinions on that, sir," Albus said. "I think that it tips our hand and raises the possibility that the Ministry will turn the full brunt of the WDF on you or the Queen, instead of the Goblins. My companion here still hopes that some form of reason will prevail and that Minister Fudge will open talks with your office in the hopes of defusing the situation."

Major shrugged. "It's the Queen's will, gentlemen. I don't like the idea of letting them know what's going on, but the Queen would prefer to end this without bloodshed, if possible. If it's any consolation, Mr. Dumbledore, even as we speak, the Ministry of Defense is going to maximum alert. Notices are being sent to our allies, explaining that

the troop movements are to protect key installations against an expected terrorist attack.

"Later this evening, my public affairs office will issue an announcement of a suspected terrorist attack, so our fellow subjects aren't unduly alarmed by the fact that the Royal Marines are erecting machine gun emplacements at Buckingham Palace."

James chuckled. "Just don't forget, if things get too dicy, get out into the open. There's a dozen dragons situated on the adjoining rooftops. The Weyrleader thought you should have the same coverage as the Queen."

Major blinked in surprise, then laughed. "Please convey my thanks to the Weyrleader for his assistance."

Ministry for Magic, street level, June 15th...

Royce Wellington considered himself a very lucky man. He stumbled from the apparation point and stared at the row of telephone booths used by the Ministry of Magic as an access point. And that's when it hit him.

Barely an hour ago he had been handcuffed and searched in an extremely uncomfortable manner by members of the Prime Minister's security staff. That the staff included several wizards shook him terribly.

He had been selected from the three man detail to deliver a very special message to the Minister of Magic from Queen Elizabeth herself! Now he found himself in quite a predicament. He knew that he would likely be killed for delivering the message. Considering the way things had been running of late, he was certain of it.

He weighed his limited options and stared unhappily at the entrance. He was so engrossed with his dilemma that he never heard the popping sound of someone else apparating in behind him.

"My, my, Mr. Wellington. Weren't you scheduled to be part of the group that visited the Prime Minister today?"

He whirled around and blanched when he spotted Senior Undersecretary Umbridge standing behind him, holding him at wand point.

She motioned with her wand and he moved back into the alley, out of sight of the people on the street.

"What happened?" she asked.

"They knew everything! Dawlish and Simpson were arrested by the muggles. They let me go to deliver this to the Minister!" he said bitterly, shoving a rolled scroll at her.

Umbridge carefully took the scroll and pocketed it. "What is it?" she asked.

"It's a demand for the total surrender of the Ministry of Magic to the muggles. In exchange for cooperating, amnesty will given to all Department Heads and Senior Ministry employees.

Umbridge's eyes flared with anger. "They dare!"

"They can!" snapped Wellington. "They took us down before we could even pull our wands. I don't know how, but they saw right through our invisibility cloaks. The Queen has declared the Ministry in rebellion and if we don't surrender, then there will be a war between us and them!"

"Oh, I don't think it will come to that, Mr. Wellington. A nudge here, a spell there and the muggles will be falling over themselves to do what they've been told. No, the real question is what to do with you?" she said softly.

Wellington blanched. "Let me go. I'll leave and not come back. You know Fudge would have killed me for delivering that note anyway."

Delores smiled brightly. "Yes, that's true. Your options are quite limited aren't they?"

Wellington paled and he dropped to his knees. "Please," he sobbed.

Umbridge pretended to consider it for a moment before she smiled cruelly at him. "Very well, I want you out of the country by midnight.

As for the message from the muggles? I'll take care of it," she said smoothly.

Wellington scrambled forward on his knees. "Thank you, thank you," he repeated over and over and Umbridge took a step back.

"Get out of here before I change my mind," she snapped.

Wellington sprang to his feet and took off running out of the alley to the sound of Umbridge's girlish laughter.

Cornelius had made a huge mistake with her vow. Without his constant instruction, he had created a loophole that she could now take advantage of. She had vowed to support and work with Cornelius, and now she had the opportunity to surprise him with a move that was guaranteed to help him. She would deal with the muggles in a manner which she was sure would get her back into Cornelius' good graces.

Meanwhile, the Queen's offer went unread and before the day was out, it would be sent to the Ministry furnaces to be burnt, along with all of the confidential trash.

Hangar Two, Campbeltown Weyr, June 19th...

For the last four days, all classes had been canceled while Harry worked the riders through an extensive amount of drilling. They practiced for six hours a day in aerial combat and spot jumping, as well as coordinated strafing with dragon fire.

Harry sat on the edge of the stage and looked around carefully. He had decided to spend the day with his riders, doing little more than relaxing. May and Hermione were nearby and both were giving their dragons an inspection. It was a ritual they all performed at least once a day, even Harry.

"What's up for today, Harry?" Ronan asked, coming up to him.

Harry smiled "I was thinking about a day off. We've all worked really hard in the past few weeks and the last four days have been brutal. I thought maybe we could just relax. Draco told me about a Weyr that has a nice beach."

Ronan looked shocked for a moment, then laughed. "I think its a wonderful idea."

Harry nodded. "Dobby," he called.

The little elf appeared with a pop and Harry leaned over to whisper something in his ear. Dobby nodded and vanished again.

"Food's taken care of," Harry murmured, then he turned back to Ronan. "What's the operational status of the Wings?"

Ronan grinned widely. "All dragons are cleared for flight. No one has reported any problems."

Harry nodded his head towards the riders still inspecting their dragons. "Let's wait until they're done with their inspections before announcing our plans."

"I'm going to go get changed," Ronan replied. "It'll be something to see some of our girls in bikinis again. I nearly died when I saw Karen in her bikini."

Harry grinned at him. "She's really pretty and I think she likes you, mate."

"Hermione is really hot, too," Ronan shot back and Harry turned pink.

"Yeah, she is," he agreed. The problem was he also thought May was really hot. And so was Luna and Susan and... He sighed. The only thing he was sure of was that he didn't need the complication of a relationship, despite his halfhearted dating of Hermione.

Neither of them was sure how to have a relationship and neither seemed eager to take it to a more physical level. Currently, it was mostly limited to hand holding, some hugs and studying together. The one kiss they'd shared had shocked them both into backing away for a bit.

Ronan walked off, trying to hold in his laughter. The riders looked tired and resigned to another day of training. They had no clue what was in store.

"Norendrath?" Harry sent.

"Weyrleader?" came the startled reply.

"Would you please tell Sirius that I intend to take the riders to Corales Isla Fuerte in Columbia for the day? It's listed in the Book of Weyrs as Weyr twenty two," he sent.

There was a moment of silence, then Norendrath replied. "Smelly Dog wants to know if he and some others can come along."

Harry blinked, then he smiled to himself. "Tell him that he can join us after lunch, but that he has to bring dinner with him."

There was another pause, then Norendrath said, "He says don't eat too much at lunch, as he's going to bring along a feast."

Harry chuckled for a moment. "Then we'll see you later, Norendrath."

He looked up to see all of his riders, except for Ronan, sitting at desks, waiting expectantly. "May, are all the wings flight capable?" he asked softly.

She nodded and he smiled in thanks, then he stood and looked at his riders. "I thought we might do something different today," he said. "We've all been working really hard lately and I can't tell you how pleased I am about how far we've come as a group. So, instead of running drills or practicing jumps between the Disko escape chamber and Gringault, we're going to do something very different today."

He grinned when he saw several looking at him fearfully. He had developed a habit of springing surprise exercises on them that were exhausting. The only thing that kept people from complaining too loudly was the fact that he took part in every exercise.

"In a few minutes I'm going to release you all so you can grab a change of clothing and your swim suits. Then we're going to Weyr twenty two for a day of relaxation on the beach," Harry said. "I've got lunch covered, and possibly dinner. Sirius said he'll handle that, but if he blows it we'll ask Tisky to whip us up something."

Tisky was the elf Dobby had hired to cook for the Weyr.

Harry looked at the riders, who stared at him in shock. Finally, he reached up and touched his face. "What? Do I have something on me?"

"Are you serious?" asked Susan.

When Harry grinned, Hermione groaned loudly. "No, don't ask that question!" she exclaimed.

"Don't you say it," May snapped, pointing at Harry. "I am sick of serious/Sirius jokes!"

Harry sighed and shook his head. "No, Susan, I wasn't kidding. Unless you guys want to spend another day doing jump drills and in-flight shooting?"

Lee Jordan bounced to his feet. "Party time!" he yelled, then ran towards the exit to get his clothing. A moment later there was a stampede for the door.

Several hours later, Harry found himself laying on a towel on the beach, watching his dragon frolic in the waves. Dobby had provided them with an excellent lunch for a day at the beach, but he was starting to wonder where Padfoot had gotten himself. He had expected him to show up before this.

He glanced over where some of the girls had set up a makeshift volley ball court with some magical help. Luna and Susan were bouncing all over their side of the court and Susan had managed to amass a sizable audience. Harry watched too, but he also found himself looking at May and Hermione, who were also well built in his opinion.

Both girls were stretched out on their own towels very close to Harry, and both were, not surprisingly, reading something.

Someone yelled and he glanced up to see Ronan sputtering and choking on water. He had gotten too close where the dragons were diving and the splashing had swamped him. The dragons were enjoying the respite as much as the riders and were launching themselves into the air, then diving into the water from a hundred feet up, resulting in large waves.

A few of the braver riders tried riding their dragons into the water from a lower altitude, but none were capable of staying on. Not that they cared. It was the thrill of dropping from fifty feet into the water that they were enjoying.

He sat up and looked around for a moment and then he frowned. "It's a shame," he muttered.

"Eh? What is?" Hermione said, looking up from her book. She and May had set up their own towels and were sunning themselves next to Harry.

He waved an arm towards the Weyr, which was carefully concealed in caves along the rocky part of the shore. "This Weyr's a fair sized one. Nearly two hundred dragons live here. But the island is too small to make this a real Weyr with riders. People live here, a lot of them, plus there's a large tourist trade. I can't help wonder how many other former reserves turned Weyrs are in the same boat?"

"We are not limited to living here, Weyrleader," said a Norwegian Ridgeback. "There are some places along the coast that would be ideal for a Weyr with room for riders."

Harry glanced over and smiled at Jetirth, the senior dragon for this Weyr. Harry had taken the riders to the Weyr proper, then they'd all walked to this particular stretch of beach that was usually empty. He spent some time talking with the senior dragon about life at the Weyr and he had made the decision to speak to every senior dragon about their Weyrs. He felt he needed to know what they needed and what help he might be able to provide.

Luna plopped down on a spare piece of towel next to Harry. "You can't worry about every little detail. We'll work these wrinkles out when we come to them."

"Luna's right," agreed May. "If you worry about every little detail you'll only earn yourself an ulcer."

Hermione nodded when he glanced her way, then she sighed. She knew he wouldn't be satisfied just yet. "Write it down," she said in resignation.

He reached out and his notebook flew out of his backpack. He made a quick note in his list of things to do and then banished the book back to his pack.

"Happy now?" Hermione asked.

He laughed. "I'm not smart like you girls. If I don't write this stuff down I'll never remember it," he replied.

Luna shook her head in dismay. She felt he never saw his own worth. "Harry, guys your age usually worry about what girl they are going to date and if they'll get lucky that night. At most, they sometimes wonder about what kind of job they want to have. It wouldn't hurt you to put your Weyrleader hat away for a day and just be a normal teen."

"I wish it were that easy, Luna," Harry replied softly.

Hermione shook her head. "The dragons certainly picked the right person for the job," she muttered then she turned to Luna. "Other than the times spent flying his dragon or his model airplane, this is the most relaxed I've seen him since Hogwarts."

Harry looked down and blushed brightly. Even in the bright sun of the tropics it was noticeable.

Hermione reached out and touched his hand. "I didn't mean that as an insult," she said quietly.

He looked up at her and nodded. "I know," he said with a weak smile.

Luna sighed and decided that if Harry wasn't going to relax very much then she might as well bring up Weyr matters with him. "I know Hermione has told you some bits about dragons and sex, but has she told you the entire story?"

May sat up suddenly and Harry's eyes were drawn to her for a second before he looked back at Luna, who was smirking at him. "Sex?" he stammered.

All three girls exchanged an amused grin.

"Harry, we think there's a good chance that when our dragons rise to mate we're going to experience urges that may be difficult to control," May said softly.

"Most likely we're going to be hornier than hell," Luna murmured.

Harry blinked and looked at her, his expression appalled. "You're serious?"

Luna smiled. Now was the time for some revenge. "No, he's your godfather. Do I look like I qualify to be a father of anything? I mean, magic can do a lot, but there are limits." She said with a serene smile.

Harry shook his head and pressed his fingers against his temples. "This can't be happening."

He shivered, then he looked at Luna intently. "All right, all kidding aside, you're saying that when Chekiath rises I'll not be able to meditate my way through it?"

Luna stared at him for a moment, then realized she was talking with the Weyrleader now and not Harry. She shrugged. "It's what we think may happen. It's possible that our bonded dragons will provide a feedback, if you like, that will fuel our own desires. We do know that mating flights often resulted in riders having sex at the same time as their dragons, typically with the other rider or with a pre-chosen partner."

Harry sat still for a moment, then he nodded and looked at Hermione.

She met his gaze and was startled by what she saw. His eyes had darkened and she couldn't help but feel like he was raking her form with that gaze. She blushed and looked away, while May and Luna both exchanged amused looks. Harry clearly signaled who he hoped would be there for him when that time came.

Finally, Harry turned back to Luna. "Fifteen," he murmured absently.

Luna blinked and looked at him in surprise. "I'm sorry?"

Harry shook his head to clear his thoughts and focused on her. "We need to up the age of our candidates. I don't think we should let

anyone below the age of fifteen impress. At least then, by the time their dragons are old enough to mate, they'll be sixteen or nearly so."

Harry paused and his eyes widened. He looked at Luna in dismay. "You're not even going to be fifteen!"

Luna shook her head. Harry had made some jumps in thinking that amazed her. She never expected him to make that particular connection. "I know," she said quietly, "but I always knew I would lose my virginity at school. Some of the students at Hogwarts would lose theirs even sooner. Especially those in betrothal contracts."

The look exchanged between the girls clearly said they would be talking about this later.

Harry grimaced, "I'm sorry about this, Luna," he said softly. "I can see why you're concerned. If you think it will help, I'll talk to Mrs Granger, or maybe Doctor Shepard, about talking with you girls about it."

Luna stared at him for a moment, dismayed. He had missed the point entirely. She opened her mouth to speak when another flight of dragons arrived overhead.

Harry glanced upwards and grinned, seeing Sirius overhead.

Sirius let out a howl and he pointed to another dragon that held Minerva McGonagall. She looked rather terrified to be on dragon back.

Sirius landed nearby and Harry stood to walk over and greet him.

Luna stared at Harry's retreating back with a frown. "He completely missed the point," she murmured.

"Not really," Hermione replied. "You just encountered Harry in Weyrleader mode. You pointed out a problem and he immediately dismissed how it affected him and focused on how it would affect us instead."

May nodded in agreement. "He dismissed his own problems as inconsequential. But it was clear who he hoped would be willing to help him."

Hermione frowned and shook her head. "No, he was just looking at me," she declared weakly. His look had been anything but casual and it troubled her. He hadn't just been looking at her and she knew it. What was worse was that she wasn't sure how she felt about it. If there was one thing that she hated the most, it was being unsure about something.

Meanwhile, Harry had crossed the distance between himself and the new arrivals and reached up to offer a hand to Minerva, who was looking rather unsteady.

"Thank you, Mr. Potter," she said after she was firmly on the ground.

He grinned at her. "Professor, may I ask you a question?"

Minerva turned to eye her student. "Of course."

Harry's grin broadened. "Were you immediately comfortable when you got on the broom for the first time?"

Minerva looked at him sharply, then she relaxed. "No. As a matter of fact, I was terrified the first time," she admitted.

"Hamanth here would have done everything in her power to keep you safe on her back, Professor," Harry said with pride. "The dragons consider it a matter of honor to carry someone safely."

"I would never let anything happen to the Harper," Hamanth said.

Minerva glanced over at the large Welch Green and smiled. It had been explained to her that, on Pern, harpers were entertainers and teachers. Many of the dragons called her Harper, or Professor Tabbycat. To them, the idea of a harper that only taught was unusual, but she was still a harper in their book. She was relieved by their acceptance, but Sirius kept trying to see if she would sing for them.

"Your point is taken, Mr. Potter," she said gently. "And thank you, Hamanth, for putting up with this old lady."

Hamanth rumbled and his eyes whirled a bright blue. "It is an honor, Harper. If you need a ride, simply ask and we will oblige."

Harry chuckled at Minerva, who appeared a little flustered by the dragon's reply, then he turned to look at Sirius. He eyed the group with him and noted that they were dressed for the beach, but it seemed that they forgot to bring dinner.

"Did you forget something, Sirius? I have three wings of hungry riders," asked Harry.

Sirius grinned at him and shook his head. "It's not like I can carry it in my back pocket," he said, then he whistled loudly. Behind them a flurry of activity took place as a large wooden platform appeared, then several dozen tables.

Harry stared in astonishment as dozens of elves placed tablecloths and utensils on each table. "How?" he gasped.

Sirius moved next to him and placed an arm over his shoulders. "The goblins have more companies than just Gringotts," Sirius said sagely. "Enough money in the right places and we have the staff of one of Britain's finest restaurants serving up a five star meal for our dinning pleasure."

Sirius waved an arm in a grand gesture, taking in the beach and the blue waters of the Caribbean ocean. "And what a setting," he exclaimed. "No mere building could top this."

Diner was a wonderful event and Harry was eternally grateful to Remus and Mildred O'Connor for joining them at his table. Remus was able to give him subtle hints about the menu, which was in French, and other things like which fork to use. The presence of the two adults at the table also helped keep the conversation on an even keel. Harry had noticed that even Hermione would slip into silliness when she was surrounded by enough girls.

Not that he'd ever be foolish enough to actually tell her that.

Originally, it was planned that the existence dragons would be used as a way of diverting media attention from the British Military efforts to take back control of the Ministry, but those plans were not used.

The first official announcement of dragons and their capabilities came in early 1996, when the Weyrleader and his dragon addressed a special assembly of Parliament at the invitation of the Queen.

Excerpted from *The Weyrs of Earth* by Remus John Lupin, published 2040.

Author's Notes and Mockeries:

- For all those that picked up on the repeat paragraph you win the prize. Please pack your bags, because you've just won a two week stint as a beta tester for Alyx's powered adult toys and fishing implements. While the paragraphs were a nice idea, we will not continue them beyond this book.

- Hermione isn't getting special treatment, while Harry may have forgiven her she still needed to deal with the fact that most of the riders were upset with her. Unlike Chapman, Harry knows Hermione and knows that giving her a physical punishment won't really solve anything, but talking will. Also, unlike Chapman who had been pushing at Harry, this is really the first time Hermione tried to buck his authority.

- Borg Rabbit doesn't believe in leaving a review. No he leaves a haiku every time he reviews. So here's my reply to his haikus.

A bear taking a dump asked a rabbit
"Does shit stick to your fur as a habit?"
"Of course not," said the hare,
"It's really quite rare!"
So the bear wiped his ass with the rabbit.

Beat that Haiku bunny.

- Loki Firefox, don't get me wrong, I like super powered Harry's, but in this story there's no need for it. He has as much power as Voldemort or Dumbledore and that's. And for the most part that power is useless to him except as an indicator of his emotional state. He realized very early on that dragons were his real power and he's shaping his world for them.

- Cornu, the goblins will have a relationship similar to what Sirius enjoys. There's something in the fundamental makeup of goblins that prevents them from impressing.

- In this story, a dragon will partake in their first mating flight roughly thirteen months after hatching. For Chekiath that means you won't see his first mating flight in this story. You'll have to wait until book two, "On the Wings of Dragons" for that to happen.

- Come one people, all those people that wrote in suggesting Snape getting sucked into the intake of a jet engine? It would be over too quick! Now tying him to a paddle of a paddle wheeled river boat sounds promising... especially in Piranha infested waters.

- Don't worry Red, Umbridge's exit will be well deserved when it comes.

Short author's notes this time. Apparently people were afraid they might make the mockeries and didn't review. Heh...

WARNING! BEEP BEEP BEEP! READ READ READ!

There are at best 2 more chapters to go in this story and then there will be a break of a month or more to allow us to get ahead in the next part of the story. Right now we're looking at one full chapter and one short chapter left in this story AFTER this chapter.

Now here are some hints about Book two. It has a title! Yay! "On the Wings of Chickens." No that's the cooking book Alyx and I are working on it's about various ways to relieve your neighborhood of that pesky problem of small children. If your kid is missing, check to see what your neighbor is bbq'ing!

"On the Wings of Dragons." Yup that's right, unless I change it.

And it's about... drum roll please. Dragons! Yup, you guessed it. It's about dragons. Alyx didn't think you'd guess it, but I knew better.

Anyway, once this story is complete, there will be a break before the next part of the story starts.

Standard Disclaimer:

Bob woke to the sound of screaming. He bounced from his bed and rushed out onto the stage. He skidded to a stop. Alyx stood center stage surrounded by a pile of parts. Nearby Severus Snape hung from a chain, slowly swinging in the breeze and howling in terror.

"What are you doing?" Bob demanded to know.

Alyx looked up with a frown. "You know that Haiku reviewer? Borg Rabbit? I figured he needed to be deborged like Jean Luc Picard."

Bob glanced at the floor and the pile of parts, some of which were still moving. He swore a single mechanical ear turned to listen to him. "I suppose that explains the pile of parts, but that was a television show not real," he muttered.

"I know, but if Beverley Crusher could do it and she wasn't a real doctor, then I figured it's got to be easy enough for me to do it!" Alyx exclaimed brightly. "Hand me the meat tenderizer and get ready with the jaws of life!"

Bob groaned. "I am going to have to explain the difference between make believe and real life again?"

"Nah," Alyx replied. "I'm fine, its the rest of the world that are deluded. Take Snape there."

She reached out with a nail gun and fired two shots in Snape's hip. He started to blubber and beg for mercy. "Snape thinks he's really an actor named Alan Rickman. I know Alan Rickman, he's a member of my fan club and he washes his hair! This guy is an imposter in pajamas!"

"Oy vey," Bob muttered. Alyx had obviously stopped taking her meds again.

"But what are you going to do with him?" asked Bob cautiously because rule number one when dealing with crazy people is to be cautious.

"He's going to give our disclaimer and tell the nice readers that we don't own Harry Potter or the Dragon Riders of Pern," Alyx proclaimed.

"He can't!"

Alyx looked up at Bob with eyes narrowed dangerously. "Why not?"

"Because you just did!"

Alyx blinked. "Oh damn, I hate when that happens." She sniffled a little and walked off the stage muttering to herself. In one hand was the one eared head of Borg Rabbit.

Bob turned to the audience. "I better go cheer her up folks, last time she got depressed she caused a blackout that affected the whole west coast. Enjoy the chapter."

As Bob left, Snape slowly turned to the audience. "Help me," he whimpered.

Dragon Handling is a brave and noble profession which has given the Wizarding world many notable heroes. Stewart Addison was the first famous dragon handler, noted for his bravery in saving the lives of dozens of his fellow handlers. Stewart ran unprotected through a rioting reserve, drawing the dragons attention to him and giving his fellows a chance to escape. Unfortunately, he didn't survive the encounter, but many a mother these days tell their children to be brave like Stewart.

Excerpt from Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find them by Newt Scamander. Published 1927.

City of Gringault, Under Gringotts, June 21st...

Ragnok rolled from his bed, careful not to disturb his mate. Barefoot, he walked over to a small shrine that was in one corner of the room and he lit an incense stick after muttering a prayer to his ancestors for guidance in the coming year.

It was part of his morning ritual and one he rarely skipped. Normally he'd have taken more time with his prayer because today was the Festival of Ookmar. which marked the year mid point. Around the

city the horde were supposed to be gathering for small family celebrations, which would end in a grand meeting in the square outside of the palace.

This year was different.

In good years, when profits were up, he would personally meet with some of the top earners of the year and thank them with gifts he had commissioned especially for the occasion. He would also give some small gifts to the most promising students the teachers had singled out for their outstanding work.

In bad years, when profits were down, he would supervise the execution of those most responsible for their losses before dealing with the students.

This year had started off badly and was now showing the potential to offer even higher than expected profits. The horde had allied itself with humans for the first time and he couldn't believe just how badly they had mismanaged the dragons under their care. Their ability to dig tunnels had been a surprise. Had they known about it, they would have refrained from culling dragons. Tunnelers were far too valuable to waste, even dragon tunnelers.

This year, however, no one was gathering for the Festival of Ookmar. There would be no formal business meeting in the grand square, no presents or punishments. This year, the Horde was on a war footing and waiting for the expected attack. This year, Ookmar was being put aside.

Ragnok grinned in the mirror and admired the fresh red enamel coating on his teeth. It had been mixed with diamond dust to give this teeth a faint glitter.

The goblins of Great Britain were ready if the wizards came.

Azkaban Prison, North Sea, June 21st...

The warden looked down at the orders that had arrived with the morning ferry and frowned. It wasn't unusual for the ferry to arrive bearing dispatches from the Ministry. The dementors were required to supply extra security on occasion, but this was different. This time, the ferry arrived towing the barge.

The barge had been used only a few times in recent memory and was reserved for moving large groups of dementors. The last time they had moved them to the mainland had been to help with the manhunt for Sirius Black. All of those dementors had fled Hogwarts in terror and refused to return to the school. They were still out there, looking for Black. The warden had tried to find out what had happened at Hogwarts to scare seventy five dementors, but he never did find out what caused it.

Now he was being ordered to turn over half his dementor force to Senior Undersecretary Umbridge. He had been informed that the Senior Undersecretary was on the ferry if he wanted to speak with her, but she had decided not to make the climb from the docks to the prison.

The Warden was about to become a victim of Fudge's own cleverness. He had relocated Umbridge to a new posting, but he hadn't demoted her, nor had he made her new position widely known. That, coupled with the fact that she had years of experience forging his signature, made this an easy thing for her to accomplish.

He sighed and shook his head. Orders were orders, after all, even if they were crazy. The manhunt for Black was still ongoing, but the trail was beyond cold, so he had no clue what good more dementors would do.

He looked up at the Senior Guard and held out the requisition. "The Undersecretary requires half our compliment of dementors for a special Ministry job. Inform the Daaka that you will need one hundred of the buggers to board the barge in the next hour. Then go down to the ferry and let the bitch know we're rounding up them up and that they should be boarding soon."

The warden waited until the guard left the room, then he opened his special drawer and pulled out a bottle of whiskey and poured a generous amount into his tea. "Not even eight in the morning and the day's gone to hell," he muttered.

Removing so many dementors from the remaining group would mean calling in off-duty guards to double shift. The prison was already short nearly one hundred dementors that were still out

hunting for Sirius Black. This move would reduce the number of dementors in the prison to barely one hundred.

Campbeltown Weyr, June 21st...

Harry had risen earlier than usual. Most of the Weyr were still sleeping as he and Chekiath began their preparations of the morning jog around the base. Across from Harry's quarters he could see the rows of tents, which were now occupied by the British Army.

Captain Atkins had introduced Harry to the Brigade commander when they returned from their outing at Corales Isla Fuerte. Brigadier General Mason was a lean, dour looking man, who eyed Harry with more than a little suspicion. He made no attempt to hide the fact that he hated that he was under orders to treat Harry as an equal and to consider all of his riders as specialists who were commissioned officers.

The army had moved onto the base while they were frolicking on the beach. Harry knew they were coming and felt it would be best if they were out of the way while they settled in. Captain Atkins had to knock a few heads together, but her company of military police, as well as a detached special unit of wizards, kept the British Army on their side of the base.

Harry finished stretching, then he turned to Chekiath and hid a smile. The dragon figured that if Harry needed to limber up before running, then he needed to do the same. Watching a dragon stretch was an amusing sight.

"Ready, mate?" he asked.

"Ready. It's a good day. I don't like running in the rain," Chekiath supplied.

Harry chuckled, then he took off at a steady trot with Chekiath carefully maintaining a pace to keep his head level with his rider. Dragons weren't built for distance running, but Chekiath could sustain a burst of speed at twenty five miles an hour for nearly a minute.

It was a quiet time for the pair and they often used the time to converse.

"Luna told me she expects the material for the rider's harnesses to start arriving at the end of the month," Harry sent.

"Good. I know some of the riders will feel more comfortable with a harness in place."

Harry gave a mental shrug. He had every confidence in his dragon's ability to fly, but no one could doubt that the harness would have helped prevent the near fatal accident Michelle had.

Harry and Chekiath hit the end of runway two nine and turned around, heading back the other way. As they ran, he noted that the soldiers were waking up. Many had exited their tents, only to stop and stare at the skinny kid with the dragon loping alongside him.

"We have company."

"Captain Atkins finally wake up?" Harry asked.

"No, some of the warriors are jogging behind us, but not too close. I think they are a bit worried I'll hit them with my tail," Chekiath replied.

Harry chuckled. "They'll only get hit if you want to hit them."

Chekiath rumbled with laughter, then he turned his head to look behind them and snorted some steam in the direction of the jogging troops. Harry laughed and couldn't help but notice the troops drop even farther behind them.

"Evil dragon," Harry sent.

Chekiath's eyes twirled and his rumbling increased.

"I wonder what happened to Katherine? She's usually out here by now," Harry sent.

"Norendrath says she spent the night in Smelly Dog's Weyr. He says they were very noisy and he can't recall a dragon mating making that much noise."

Harry blushed. "Oh," he replied. He blinked a few times before deciding that he really didn't need to comment further. He would

need to talk to Remus, however. He was certain there was a prank or two in there somewhere.

An hour later, after he had showered and shaved, he entered the kitchen hall. The shaving was a new thing for him, but it wasn't unexpected. According to Remus, his father had a terrible five o'clock shadow and started shaving earlier than Harry had.

The Kitchen Hall was more full than usual, but none of the new soldiers were there. They were eating in their own field kitchens. The only soldiers besides Captain Atkins' detail were the officers and senior staff of the brigade that was currently enjoying their breakfast across the runway.

Harry paused in the entrance. "Cheki, please tell all the dragons to wake their riders. I want us all done with breakfast in an hour," he sent.

"Most of them are up and will be in the kitchen hall shortly."

"Thanks, mate."

He grabbed his breakfast and steered unerringly for the table with Sirius, Remus, Captain Atkins and Doctor O'Connor. Placing his tray on the table, he nodded to the greetings of the others and slid into a seat next to Remus.

"So, Sirius, Norendrath tells me you had company last night," Harry said softly.

Sirius froze and Katherine looked at Harry with wide eyes.

"Yup. He said that your howling made more noise than a dragon mating flight."

Harry reached for his morning tea as Remus looked at Harry, then at Sirius, then at Katherine. His grin broadening with each new face. Christmas had come early! Padfoot had been caught flatfooted by a dragon!

"Howling?" exclaimed Remus.

Sirius stared at his plate, his face beet red.

"He only did that once and I think he was just fooling around. I think. At least I hope he was fooling around," Katherine muttered.

Harry laughed hard, sagging against Remus to remain upright.

Remus smirked. "Gives a new meaning to the term Howler, eh, Siri?" he quipped.

Sirius groaned and buried his head in his hands, then he peeked between his fingers at Harry. "You do know you have to die now, don't you?"

Harry sat up straight, shook his head and reached for a piece of toast. "You do realize I have the biggest dragon in the world watching my back, right?"

"Dammit!" Sirius said. He knew he couldn't easily get by Chekiath.

"Does this mean I can eat him if he's in dog form?" asked Chekiath hopefully.

"No, I called first bite," protested Norendrath.

Sirius paled and cringed. "I'm not leaving the kitchen hall, ever," he muttered, looking up at the ceiling nervously.

Harry chuckled at the byplay. He knew Sirius would be out to prank him now but that was the way of these things.

WDF Offices, Ministry of Magic, June 21st...

Brent Thompson was surrounded by people when Cornelius Fudge entered the room. Fudge looked around and noted with satisfaction the number of people who nodded respectfully to him. The room was enormous and still only held a fraction of the total WDF. Space enlargement charms had been extensively used in these rooms making them large enough to fit nearly two hundred people.

Thompson turned away from issuing his orders and he noted Fudge standing near the entrance. He walked over to the Minister and gave him a slight bow. "Sir, we'll be ready to begin in just a few minutes. The last of the portkeys are being created now."

"How many are we sending?" asked Cornelius.

"Eight hundred and twenty three, to be exact," Thompson replied. "They are well trained to handle those animals."

Cornelius clasped his hands behind his back and rocked on the balls of his feet. "Excellent, excellent," he murmured. "I must prepare a press statement to announce our victory and the capture of the dragon herd."

"Yes, sir. I'll be leaving with our forces. I thought they would fight harder if I led the attack personally," Thompson said.

Fudge turned to eye the man for a moment, then nodded. If Thompson survived the attack he would be very popular, he mused. If that happens, I may have to do something about him.

"Very well. Good luck to you and your men," Fudge said, then he turned and left the room.

A bell rang in the room and everyone scrambled for their portkeys.

Hangar #2, Campbeltown Weyr, June 21st...

Harry climbed up on the stage and looked at his riders. He was pleased to see everyone was already dressed for flight, although several were looking at their ammo bandoliers curiously. Harry had made a change to the ammo load out and he could see that some of his riders were puzzled by it.

"Harry," called May. She stopped when he held up his hand.

"I know, May, but hear me out first, okay?"

She nodded. Harry had helped May become more comfortable with the bow but he knew she didn't like carrying the weapon.

"You'll note that each of the bandoliers has five new slots, which contain regular sharpened bolts and no enchantment. And yes, these bolts can be lethal. I am including them just as an emergency measure. You still have most of your basic ammo supply, just remember that the bolts at the bottom of your bandolier can kill."

Harry looked at May directly. "I pray you'll never find yourself in a position where you'll need to use one of these things, but they are there if you do need them."

He locked gazes with May until she nodded, though reluctantly.

Harry turned back to the others and froze.

"Weyrleader, wizards are attacking the goblin building on the surface," Polenth said.

"All wings get ready to assemble at Campbeltown," Harry broadcast. In four other Weyrs around the world, nearly one thousand dragons prepared to jump to Campbeltown.

Harry pulled his wand and made a complicated movement with it, creating an eerie siren like wail that was heard all over the base. Sheathing his wand, he noted everyone was pulling on their jackets and heading towards the doors, which someone had already started opening.

In the tent camp, the British troops were scrambling for their packs and weapons before lining up along the edge of the runway. From Hangers Three, Four and Five, the non-bonded dragons of Campbeltown Weyr came loping out, heading for the troops massing on the runway. Overhead, more flights of dragons appeared to help transport the troops to Gringault. All total, over fifteen hundred dragons were assembling to move the British Army to the aid of their ally.

It was a mixed group of soldiers; eight hundred regular army soldiers and two hundred hurriedly trained wizards making up a special action group. Each soldier had had exactly one ride previously on a dragon so they had an idea of what to expect.

The Weyr's involvement was simple: move the troops, then evacuate Gringault of the non-combatants, taking them to Disko Island. There were over three thousand goblins who had to be moved from the city, so it would require two trips to Disko.

Harry could have called up more dragons, but the square in front of Ragnok's palace could, at best, hold only hundred dragons at a time.

The riders and their dragons would not be carrying any soldiers to the goblins, so they assembled in front of Hangar Two. Harry watched silently from Chekiath's back as Campbeltown dragons and dragons from other Weyrs formed up in lines, waiting for the person they would be carrying.

"Spath, when the wings are fully loaded, bring them to Gringault. We're going on ahead," Harry sent, then he paused and sent a warning to the dragons who were guarding the queen and the Prime Minister.

"Yes, Weyrleader," Spath replied.

Harry pumped his fist and the three wings sprang aloft.

Gringotts, Diagon Alley, June 21st...

The first sign of trouble came when the guards at the door noticed the large group of wizard portkeying into the alley near where Ollivanders once had his shop. Following orders from the Gringotts Executive, the guard locked down the doors and sounded the alarm.

With frightening intensity, the tellers closed their stations and fled into a back room. The guards followed them a moment later, leaving nearly a dozen wizards wondering what was happening. They were trapped in the Gringotts lobby and were about to become the first innocent bystanders in the Three Race war.

Down in Gringault, a klaxon sounded across the city and families rushed their children, pregnant females and older folks to the plaza in front of palace. At the same time, more than one hundred of Polenth's dragons made their way from their warrens toward the upper levels. Having sacrificed the ability to fly in favor of walking, these dragons were capable of moving faster on the ground than their flying cousins.

Ragnok pulled on his mail shirt and buckled on his belt with his favorite axe, then he strode purposefully out of his home. He ignored the guard that formed up around him as he stood at the top of his stairs.

"Lord Holder, I have informed the Weyrleader," Polenth informed him.

Ragnok glanced over to the aging dragon and nodded. "Thank you, Polenth."

Minutes ticked slowly by and Ragnok was beginning to wonder if he had been tricked by the humans when suddenly Harry appeared with his three manned wings of dragons overhead. Polenth reared up on his hind legs and bugled a loud welcome to the dragons.

Chekiath angled sharply and came to a landing at the foot of the steps. "Lord Ragnok, the Weyr brings its greetings and aid to help our friends," Harry called from the back of Chekiath. Around the plaza, the three wings landed on whatever perches they could find. Their job was to help with the evacuation, but they were not carrying passengers.

Ragnok gave Harry a salute in return. "The horde welcomes their allies. May our combined strength crush our enemies," he called.

At that moment, the space above the city erupted with dragons and Ragnok staggered back in surprise. This was far more dragons than Harry had brought when he forced the goblins to submit to his demand that they cease culling. Ragnok was surprised. It was one thing to talk about thousands of dragons, it was another matter to actually see them.

Harry smiled at Ragnok's expression, then he glanced up. "Just as we discussed, Spath. Land the wings in order."

He could see that a number of his riders from Wings One and Three were now in the plaza, beckoning to the goblins who were lining the space in front of the buildings. The first of five wings landed and the soldiers scrambled off their backs.

The riders motioned to the goblins and they surged forward. They were putting an adult goblin and a child on each dragon wherever possible.

Harry watched the process for a moment, then he turned towards Marty Benson. "Marty, take your wing to Disko. You know what to

do," he called, then he swung his leg over Cheki's neck and lightly dropped to the ground.

Marty waved and, with a silent command, his wing sprang aloft and vanished. Half a minute later, the first group of goblin bearing dragons sprang aloft and vanished. Then the next wing landed to unload their soldiers.

Harry walked up the stairs slowly. When he reached the top, he moved to stand with Ragnok. They both watched the soldiers forming up. Harry wasn't surprised to see Croaker standing next to Brigadier Mason.

"It's going well," Harry murmured to himself. Then he turned to face the goblin. "Lord Ragnok, I know you intend to stay with your people and help lead the fight, but I have asked Polenth to hold back several dragons to evacuate your family and yourself, should the unthinkable happen."

Ragnok stopped the biting comment from passing his lips and he nodded. It took him a moment to realize the Weyrleader wasn't calling him a coward. He looked up at Harry carefully and for the first time noted the true concern that was written on his face. "You honor us, Weyrleader. I hope when this day is over we can find more productive ways to express our friendship."

Harry nodded and they both turned back to the evacuation, which was proceeding flawlessly.

Up in Gringotts, the WDF had blasted their way into the building, killing six of the wizards inside and wounding the rest. A large group of wizards moved into the building and started overturning desks and making a mess, while several men set up to break the wards on the door that led down to the track.

Escape Chamber, Disko Island June 21st...

Marty slid down the side of Olaronth and patted his dragon for a moment while he looked around in surprise. He knew that goblins had been working on improving the chamber but he hadn't realized the extent of the changes.

The goblins were coming now, but Polenth and his clan would only retreat if they were forced to give up Gringault.

For the past week Polenth's dragons had brought goblin tunnelers to Disko to work on enhancing the chamber that was originally hallowed out by the dragons for Polenth and his clan. It wasn't luxurious, but they had managed to add several additional chambers and piped in fresh water from outside.

The new chambers contained cooking facilities and bedding for the refugees. The goblins had also cast their spells on the volcano, then installed a ward, which they said would give enough notice of an eruption to safely evacuate the Weyr.

Marty walked over to Elder Gapsit, who was waiting for the first dragons to arrive. He and several of the older members of the Gringotts Executive council had arrived yesterday in anticipation of the evacuation.

"Elder Gapsit? I'm Marty Benson, leader of Wing Two. The first group was loading up and should be here shortly. The Weyrleader sent us to help with the unloading," Marty said.

Gapsit looked at the young man and nodded with relief. "I am glad to have you here, Wing Leader. To be honest, I was worried that we didn't have anyone with any experience with the dragons. Some of our elderly are quite frail and getting them off of the dragons could be troublesome."

Marty smiled at the goblin. "It will be fine. The Weyrleader has decided to split the wings when they arrive. There isn't a lot of flying space in the chamber, so every other wing will arrive outside in the main bowl of the Weyr and use the tunnels to enter the chamber."

As he spoke, two wings appeared overhead. Gapsit barked some commands in Gobbledegook and twenty goblins exited the side chambers, rushing to help unload the dragons. Marty made a gesture and most of his wing went over to assist in the unloading.

Luna ran to the main entrance of the chamber and she touched a set of runes with her wand, lighting up a sequence of rune stones leading all the way back to the main bowl. The tunnel to this deep chamber was now clearly lit for the dragons.

Gringotts, Diagon Alley, June 21st...

The first clash between wizard and goblin was decidedly one sided and the outcome shouldn't have been a surprise. The ward breakers finished breaking down the ward on the door and then a dozen wizards blew it inward, while the ward breakers scurried out of the line of fire.

Several dozen goblin guards charged through the opening, brandishing battle axes and short swords and were cut down by hundreds of killing curses. It was only a minor first skirmish, but not a single goblin survived.

With the guard dead, Thompson stepped forward. "Into the tunnels!" he shouted and the WDF surged forward, bolstered by the results of their victory.

Segoth lumbered up passage sixty three right. He was an old dragon, raised and bred to be highly aggressive. He was part of the vault security until the Weyrleader had awakened the dragons to their intelligence. After the goblins and the Weyr had agreed to work together, he returned to his old job of guarding the tunnels for the goblins.

Like so many of his brothers, even with their new found intelligence, they were aggressive and quick to anger. They had been bred for it and even their awakening couldn't completely remove those tendencies.

As chance would have it, Segoth happened to be the dragon closest to the track entrance that the wizards were using. His keen eyesight allowed him to spot the wizards making their way down the catwalks that lined the tunnels when he was still nearly a thousand yards away. He bellowed angrily and started to charge, his claws easily gripping the track and his call echoed up and down the tunnels.

With no room to maneuver and having tipped the wizards to his charge, he skidded to a halt less than a hundred feet from them, dead after receiving more than fifty killing curses.

Down in Gringault, Harry stiffened and several of the rider's dragons began to keen. He scowled deeply and closed his eyes for a

moment, taking a deep breath. When his eyes opened again, Ragnok was surprised to see them burning with magic. "Dragons," Harry called to all, "one of ours has been killed, but we must wait to mourn. We must work together and quickly. We will honor our fallen once the crisis has past."

"Weyrleader?" asked Ragnok in alarm. He had not heard Harry's announcement to the dragons but he had noticed the dragons turn to look at Harry and they stopped the mournful sound they were making.

"I apologize, Lord Ragnok. One of our dragons has been killed by wizards. I had to instruct our dragons to concentrate on their jobs. We will mourn and honor our fallen later," Harry said in a voice thick with emotion.

He then turned to Polenth. "Your clan is authorized to use lethal fire if there are no soldiers or goblins in the way. Burn them to ash, Polenth."

Polenth's eyes whirled rapidly, flashing red. "It will be done, Weyrleader."

When Ragnok looked at Harry strangely, he shrugged. "When discussing plans for this attack, I'd told them not to use lethal force. I dislike killing anyone, but will do so if I must."

"It is an admirable quality, but compassion should be put aside during wartime, Weyrleader. Save it for your own people or for when it pays to be merciful, such as near the end of a conflict," Ragnok offered.

Harry smiled at the goblin. "I will consider it, Lord Ragnok. I am new to this business of being a leader and not too proud to take advice from people who've been down this road before."

By now the soldiers had completely disembarked from the dragons and they were leaving the plaza at a trot, led by goblin guides. They were being taken to a station where they would get into carts to be taken up close to where the wizards were.

Ragnok watched them leave the plaza and he felt a stirring of deep satisfaction in his breast. This is the kind of partnership we should

have had with the wizards, he thought. The muggles treat us as people, the dragons treat us as people. Even this Weyrleader, who is a wizard, treats us properly. What went wrong with the wizards, I wonder?

With the soldiers out of the way, the loading of the dragons was able to begin in earnest and Harry spotted the first wing returning from Disko. He nodded to himself. At least the evacuation was going smoothly.

Balmoral Castle, June 21st...

It hadn't been hard to move the dementors. The Department of Magical Transportation had a number of people capable of making large portkeys. She had demanded they create one for this location and they did as they were told.

Delores Umbridge looked up at the lead dementor. "You have your orders," she said imperiously. She was one of those very rare wizards immune to the effects of the dementors.

The lead dementor glanced over at her, then it extended a boney claw towards the castle nearly a mile away.

"Yes, yes. Kiss everyone you find. Now get moving. Find that foul muggle Queen and make sure she regrets meddling in the affairs of her betters!" Umbridge shouted.

The dementor bowed and started to float towards its objective, its companions following close behind.

What Delores hadn't taken into account was the amount of tourists that visited the castle daily, nor that many come by the busload.

A large tour bus had just pulled up to unload passengers in the parking lot. Three others had already unloaded and the passengers were milling around, waiting for their tour guide to start. It was a target the dementors could not ignore. They fell upon the hapless tourists like starving wolves, which immediately alerted the Queen's security to the danger.

The dementors were visible on the castle's infrared security cameras, but not to the naked eye.

A siren cut across the estate as the Queen's security tried to marshal itself against an enemy they couldn't even see. The eight wizards on duty frantically tried to explain the problem to their muggle counterparts. The dragon guard could see the foul creatures and they could do something about them.

Narth and his wing of ten non-bonded dragons sprang aloft, suddenly becoming visible to everyone, which only added to the growing panic. Narth and his dragons bellowed in anger and challenge to the floating demons below.

"Weyrleader, we are under attack," Narth called urgently. He didn't know these creatures, but little could withstand the hottest dragon fire. And he was under orders to defend the castle against any attack.

The dragons laid down a line of fire in front of the dementors and for a moment they recoiled from the line. Then twenty dementors broke free from their group and attacked the last dragon in the formation. Narth watched in horror as Ranglieth, a Chinese Fireball, was swarmed over.

The dragons and their fire caused the people in the parking lot to bolt in all directions.

Ranglieth bellowed under the assault and plunged into the ground from nearly two hundred feet. The dementors might not be capable of sucking out a dragon's soul, but their effects could disrupt a dragon just as easily as they could a human. The dragon plowed into several cars, then rolled free of the tangled wreckage. Ranglieth moved feebly for a few more seconds, then stilled.

Narth screamed in anger and banked sharply with his remaining dragons following him. He picked a cluster of dementors on the ground and swooped down at full speed, flaming them with his hottest fire. The dementors caught fire and made an awful wailing sound as they tried to flee.

When the dementors caught on fire, it added to the general sense of panic. Shots rang out from snipers on the roof of the castle, hitting the flaming dementors, but they had no effect.

Narth started to pull up when twenty dementors latched onto him. "Weyrleader," he started to call, then shuddered from the effects of the dementors. In his mind, he heard the sound of the dragons bellowing and his intelligence seemed to vanish. In less than a second, he was back in the time of the beasts and he plunged into the ground, crashing into several cars and a bus.

The dementors released him and he struggled weakly. He was in great pain and the presence of the dementors nearby were preventing him from calling for help. Reduced to his animal instincts, he bellowed and tried to snap at a dementor, but it easily moved out of his reach.

Gringotts tunnels, under London, June 21st ...

The wizards advancing in the tunnels had no clear goal in mind. Few humans had ever visited the fabled city of the goblins, all they knew was it was 'down'. So down was the route they took and as they did, they occasionally ran into goblins who they were able to quickly overwhelm. So far they had been incredibly lucky, but they didn't know it.

It wasn't until they had reached the fourteenth level of Nantoosh East when they encountered the horde and their allies.

Down in Gringault, both Harry and Ragnok jumped in surprise as the loud echo of gunfire and grenades filtered down from Nantoosh East, nearly twenty levels above the city.

The tunnels were narrow and crammed with wizards, soldiers and goblins. The WDF had encountered a four way intersection that was barricaded in one direction by Goblins and the British Army. Most of the soldiers were equipped with infrared scopes and they were picking off any wizard who dared to show himself. Meanwhile, the goblins added to the confusion by filling the tunnels with a dense black smoke, which cut visibility even further.

The wizards of the WDF crept forward using conjured items as cover. Their magical shields were great for blocking most energies, but they didn't stop bullets or the hundreds of bits of metal blown away from a rocket propelled grenade.

Lath burned through the last few feet of the new passage, then two others of his clan popped Between and back without moving. The cold blast of air instantly solidified and cooled the surface of the rock, cracking it with a series of sharp staccato pops. The noise from the battle was incredible and fortunately it covered the sound of the dragons cutting a tunnel behind them.

Lath turned to the goblin in charge of his people. "Are you ready, Master Miner Brusk?"

Brusk nodded gleefully. The anticipation was impossible to resist. Lath rumbled and lifted a leg, offering him help getting onto his back. The underground dragons of Gringotts were smaller than their above ground cousins, but they were still too big for a human adult to sit on their backs in these tunnels. Goblins, however, were a different story. They fit just fine.

Brusk climbed up the flank of the dragon and looked back in time to see his people all in position. Behind them were five legions of the horde, more than ten thousand goblins. "We are ready, Master Tunneler Lath," Brusk said. He was a master tunneler by trade, but in his mind, the dragons were even better than he was.

"Then we go," replied Lath. He bellowed once and the one hundred dragons with him loped out into the tunnel behind the WDF, belching fire and boring hexes from their goblin riders. Behind the dragons poured thousands of Goblins of the Horde. The WDF was surrounded and cutoff from the outside world.

City of Gringault, Under Gringotts, June 21st...

"Weyrleader, we are under attack," Narth called urgently.

Harry staggered and paled at the call. Less than half a minute later, he heard Narth call once more, then cut off.

Harry whirled on his heel. "Lord Ragnok, I must go. The Queen is under attack!"

"Go, Weyrleader. We will hold the city, I'm sure of that," Ragnok replied.

"Spath!" Harry called as he bolted for Chekiath, who was already moving forward. "The dragons at the Queen's castle are under attack! Dragons! To me!"

Around the world, Harry's desperate cry was heard and the jump imagery he was sending was picked up. In seconds, every able-bodied dragon not involved in the evacuation was airborne. The Weyrleader who'd given them so much needed them. And while the choice was theirs, no dragon would refuse his call.

Harry literally vaulted onto Chekiath's back, boosted by his own magic. Around him, both wings scrambled into the air as their riders remounted. A moment later, they were gone from Gringault.

Harry burst out of Between over the castle and look down on a scene of utter chaos. "Dementors," he swore. He noted several dragons down and unmoving and what looked like several buses on fire.

"If a human is moving, they must be moved to safety," Harry sent.

What happened next would be debated for years to come.

Harry pulled off a glove and reached out to touch Chekiath directly. "Expecto Patronum," he incanted. Chekiath burst into blinding brilliance as thousands of dragons appeared in the air and began to swoop down to pluck any human still moving from the mass of dementors.

The dragons in the air split off. Nearly one thousand dragons formed a flying barrier, preventing the dementors from reaching the castle.

People were screaming, but there was no time to explain to anyone. The dragons just wanted to get those people still alive out of the line of danger. Each person saved was taken Between and moved to the large grassy field behind the castle. Several hundred dragons moved to provide those humans with protection from the demons.

Chekiath bellowed and dove sharply, blasting the dementors with fire. Hundreds of dragons followed the Weyrleader, flaming the dementors. The demons burst into flame and made an awful wailing sound as they floated over the parking lot. Many scattered, trying to

escape the brilliant white dragon who repulsed them worse than any patronus charm ever had.

The fire killed the dementors, but the dragons couldn't help hitting some of the vehicles. A bus exploded in a fire ball, spraying bits of molten metal in every direction.

Harry smiled grimly when two dragons from his wing and two from wing Three copied his action. Now five dragons were brilliantly lit up and dealing flaming death to the dementors who were trying to flee. Susan Bones and Draco Malfoy of Wing Three and Millicent and Wayne from his wing had cast a patronus using their dragons, rather than their wands.

It was a surprisingly effective technique.

Harry blinked as the bolt of green passed by his head and he looked for its source. "Chekiath, did you see who did that?" he asked.

"There is a woman by the trees," Chekiath replied.

Harry looked and spotted the woman who was down on her knees, obviously exhausted from casting the killing curse. He was surprised. The curse did require a fair amount of power to cast but a modestly powered wizard should be capable of casting it several times. She must be truly weak to become that exhausted from one casting, he mused as he directed his dragon down to intercept her.

Delores Umbridge was breathing heavily and trembling. She had moved closer to the castle so she could watch the dementors at work. Initially, she was overjoyed with the carnage, then she was shocked when the dragons appeared to defend the castle. When some of the dragons were brought down by the dementors, she was elated, but that didn't last long.

When thousands of dragons appeared, she knew the attack would fail if she didn't do something. She took aim for the person riding on the back of the largest dragon and missed by several yards. The curse took everything she had and she dropped to her knees. The killing curse required power which she didn't have a lot to spare.

Delores looked up just in time to see Chekiath reach for her with his huge front paws as he swooped down on her. She had time enough

to scream and then he went Between. When Harry and Chekiath emerged from Between, his paws were empty. She was a threat that had to be eliminated and they had taken care of it.

Harry looked down at the forty or so remaining dementors they had been penned up by dragons and their fire. Another group of dragons copied Cheki's trick by snatching a dementor and taking it Between. It took less than half a minute to grab the remaining dementors and dispose of them Between. Harry leaned back in his spot on Chekiath and wiped a trembling hand over his face. "Is that all of them?" he muttered mostly to himself. Maintaining the patronus on Chekiath was tiring work.

Chekiath turned slightly and looked at one of the large clumps of dragons still airborne. He could hear Chekiath ordering them to search the area to make sure none of the demons escaped.

Harry directed Chekiath to land closer to the castle and his wings followed the still glowing dragon. He dismounted and canceled the spell on Chekiath, returning him to normal. "I like that feeling, Harry. It was like you were pushing all your love through me," Chekiath said softly, turning his head to gently touch his rider's cheek.

Harry leaned against his dragon for a moment. "I was, mate. You know how I feel about you." He replied, then he turned to survey the mess. Dozens of cars and a couple of buses were on fire and the ground was littered with kissed people. Here and there a person or two climbed out from under a car where they had been hiding from the strange creatures that didn't appear until they were on fire.

Harry saw one woman who still had a babe in her arms. Both looked like they had been kissed. He gasped, then turned away from the sight and pitched to his knees, throwing up his breakfast. His heaves continued for a few more minutes, despite there being nothing to throw up. Finally, he sat back on his knees. "We were too late," he said in anguish.

A hand appeared holding out a water bottle and he took it without thinking. He drank deeply trying to cleanse the sour taste from his mouth.

"No, you were just in time," said a voice.

He looked up and spotted the Queen surrounded by her security detail. Quite a few of the men carried automatic weapons, which they held trying to cover the riders and dragons. It was almost comical to see them standing up to the largest dragons on the planet with little more than small caliber automatic weapons.

The Queen spoke sharply to one of her men and they all lowered their weapons and relaxed. The dragons were an intimidating sight, but they were allies.

One of the men began passing out bottles of water to all the riders from the back of a truck. Harry wasn't the only one to lose his breakfast.

"Your Majesty," Harry stammered, scrambling to his feet.

The Queen held up a hand. "Rest now, Weyrleader. You and your dragons saved us from a terrible tragedy today. What happened was terrible, but it could have been so much worse. My staff are already calming those rescued out in our backyard. I think we will find more survived than were lost."

May came running up to Harry, then skidded to a halt when she noticed the Queen. She gave the Queen a little curtsy.

"Rest easy, child," the Queen said gently. "You obviously have something to say?"

"Yes, ma'am," May said softly then she turned to Harry. "Narth is injured. So are four more that were part of the guard here. Ranglieth, he didn't make it." She shuddered.

"I know, Cheki informed me. Do you know how? I don't think the dementors are capable of sucking out a dragon soul." Harry replied heavily.

Chekiath keened softly next to Harry and he reached out to stroke his dragon.

"I think his flight was interrupted somehow. He looks like he fell from a great height," May replied.

"The demons took away our intelligence," Narth offered.

Harry closed his eyes and bit back a moan. He could feel the pain in the dragon's voice. Narth's comment makes sense, he thought. The dragons would rather die than return to the time of the beasts. If a dementor forced a dragon to remember that time, they would lose their abilities. Maybe even lose the ability to fly.

"You know what these creatures are, Weyrleader?" asked the Queen. Not being magical, she had only been able to see them when they caught fire. But here, surrounded by the carnage they created, she couldn't ignore their terrible power.

Harry ran a trembling hand through his hair. "Yes, ma'am. They're demons under control of the Ministry of Magic. Normally, they're used as guards for your prison on Azkaban Island and also as executioners. They suck out any happy thoughts and force you to relive the worst moments of your life. And worse than that, when ordered, they can literally suck the soul right out of your body. A sentence to Azkaban is a sentence of constant torment."

Harry gestured to the people lying motionless on the pavement.

"All of the people laying in the lot there? Their bodies live, but their souls are gone and they will never be the same again. They are as good as dead," he said, his voice breaking slightly.

The Queen shuddered in revulsion and Harry noted her cheeks were streaked with tears. Without thinking, he conjured a chair for her to sit on and she gave him a grateful look.

"We find it appalling that any part of our government would use such foul creatures," she said softly as she sat down.

The sound of sirens was heard over the crackle of the flames and Harry glanced over to see a large group of military vehicles approaching. One of the security men bolted for the lead truck, waving his arms wildly. He didn't want them to start shooting at the dragons.

"Ma'am, several of my dragons are injured, too injured to be taken Between to the Weyr. Would you allow us to move them to a nearby area where we can treat them?" Harry asked.

The Queen nodded and Harry turned to May. "Set up a temporary infirmary over in that tree line. Send word to Marty to get one of the tents from Disko for us to use for now."

"Perhaps when they are better we can arrange for transportation to your Weyr, Weyrleader. We owe you a great debt. If by some small measure we can repay that debt by helping you heal your injured, we shall," the Queen said, then she turned to one of her security men. "Speak with Miss McNulty later and see what needs we can help with."

May looked startled that the Queen knew her name and she bobbed another little curtsy. "Thank you Mum," she said.

"Weyrleader, the fight here is nearly over. Many humans and goblins are hurt, but the wizards have been destroyed. Brusk and his people are hunting down the few wizards who escaped in side tunnels," Polenth said.

Harry nodded to himself. "And of your clan, Polenth?"

"We lost five, Weyrleader, and twelve more are hurt," came the sad reply.

Harry inhaled deeply, then sighed. "It's over, ma'am. Polenth tells me that the fighting is nearly done. The wizard army has been defeated."

The Queen moved to say something when one of her people handed her a phone. "It's the Prime Minister, ma'am."

The Queen held out a hand and took the phone. While she spoke with her Prime Minister, Harry turned his face to the skies and the thousands of dragons overhead. His eyes glazed over and all of the nearby dragons turned to him. "Thanks to you, my friends, we have attained victory. We shall mourn our losses and honor them by moving forward. Thank you for your help. You may return to your Weyrs, but know that I will always be grateful for your help this day."

The wings overhead started to blink out as the senior dragons called their wings to jump Between. Harry looked over at the still form of Ranglieth and he sighed again.

"It seems that you are correct, Weyrleader. The Prime Minister called to inform me that our forces are reporting the fighting coming to an end. We still have the Ministry to deal with and our Prime Minister requests a meeting with you tomorrow to discuss plans."

Harry nodded and then he bowed to her. "With your permission, we'll set up to care for our injured, then retire to the Weyr."

The Queen waved and Harry backed away, then he turned to Chekiath and climbed back into his place. "May," he called, "there are wounded at Gringault. Hagrid will be going there while Marty is bringing us a tent from Disko. I'll send word to the Weyr to find us a heavy tarp. We'll put each dragon on the tarp and lift it over to forest's edge."

May looked up at him in relief. She had heard from Trath about the injured back at the goblin city and was afraid that they would leave her tending four injured dragons by herself.

Less than an hour later, Harry looked around with satisfaction. The dragons had been moved as carefully as they could. He had put each dragon into a magical sleep to make the short trip even easier. The tent was erected and May was running around giving orders to a half dozen riders who had been studying with her.

Finally, May sat down on a chair Harry had conjured for her and she pushed back a lock of blond hair and smiled wearily. "All of the dragons have been checked over and are sleeping now. Narth has the worst injury. I'll have to figure out a way to immobilize his leg. I am pretty certain it's broken."

May suspected he had done more than wrench it when he crashed, but she had no way of x-raying the leg.

"I dislike leaving you here, May. I know you have four other riders here, but you're very exposed here. The WDF might be defeated, but there are still wizards about," Harry replied.

"I'm sure we'll be fine."

"Yeah and I thought the Queen would be safe with only ten dragons watching her," he said bitterly.

She shook her head. She knew he was blaming himself for their losses. "No one could have expected that those monsters would show up here. You shouldn't blame yourself."

Harry nodded absently. He had a far away look in his eyes that she knew meant he was talking to dragons and not really listening to her. Suddenly, forty dragons appeared overhead. The two wings split apart, with one heading to the castle while the other landed close to where May sat. The dragons immediately moved into the wood line and faded from view.

"Just a precaution," Harry murmured, answering the question he saw her in her eyes. "I'll send some people from Wing Two later today. They'll give you a chance to come home and clean up and change, if you want. You and Hagrid are going to be very busy for the next few days, I fear. Can you suggest someone who can take over at the Weyr infirmary?"

May thought for a moment, "Cindy Taylor or Alice Wagner are really good with the dragons. So is Katie Bell."

Harry grinned. "Very good. I'll take the wings home, then. If you need anything at all, have Trath give me a shout."

May smiled at him and gave him a shoo with her hands. He did have a tendency to hover whenever a dragon was seriously sick, so she was glad to see him go. She also knew he had a lot more still to do today.

Harry turned back to Chekiath. "Let's get them saddled up, mate. It's time to go home."

Chekiath bobbed his head, his eyes still twirling with streaks of yellow. All of the dragons were still upset, and so was his rider, even if he was struggling to hold it together.

Harry watched his riders mount. When they were ready, he pumped his fist twice, ordering the wings aloft.

"Finally," May grumped, then she grinned at the riders that remained behind. "I like Harry a lot, but he can be a real mother hen sometimes. Now, let's make a list of what we're going to need in the coming week."

Office of the Minister, Ministry of Magic, June 21st...

Cornelius paced back and forth in front of his desk. The WDF and Thompson had vanished into the Gringotts building more than eight hours ago and no one had heard a word from them!

The door opened and his secretary stuck her head in. "Minister, Elmo Kirtland is asking to speak with you. He says it's urgent."

Cornelius scrambled to take his place behind his desk. Finally, he would get some answers. "Send him in and see that we're not disturbed."

A moment later, Kirtland stepped into the room looking decidedly pale. He was a minor secretary who Fudge had sent to Diagon Alley to find out what was happening.

"Well? What did you find out?" demanded Fudge.

"Not much, Minister. There are goblins working on the exterior of the building, making repairs. When I attempted to enter the building, I was told to get off their property or I would be beheaded on the spot. They also told me the Gringotts is closed until further notice."

Fudge paled and he sunk low in his chair. "You saw no sign of our forces? No sign of Thompson?"

"You know the block they have?" Kirtland asked, then he shivered.

The block had been used, rarely, in the past for the displaying of heads the goblins took from thieves. In living memory, the most Gringotts had ever displayed at one time was two heads.

"Yes, yes! Go on!"

"They have more than a dozen heads on display, mounted on pikes out in front. It was ghastly. They were still dripping with blood. They didn't put up a sign as they usually do, but some people in the Alley recognized them as being members of the WDF. The people are all in a panic. They seem to think the goblins are about to murder them all. Some store keepers have packed up their shops and fled. I would be surprised if there are any shops still open tomorrow."

Cornelius looked shocked, then he stood abruptly. "We need to put a positive spin on this quickly! Run to the Prophet and tell them I want to see Skeeter as soon as possible."

Kirtland glanced at the wall clock, "I can try, Minister, but it's late, nearly five, Skeeter may be gone for the day."

"Then tell them I want to see her first thing tomorrow!" he bellowed.

Kirtland backed up in fear and nodded vigorously. "Yes, sir. I'll take care of it right away!"

He glared at Kirtland as the man retreated from his office, then he slumped down in his chair. "Dammit to hell!" he snarled. This was a disaster, but he was certain he could save himself by blaming Umbridge and Thompson.

"Minister?"

He glanced up to see his secretary sticking her head in the room.

"Yes?" he replied tiredly.

"The Warden of Azkaban is on the floo asking how long Madam Umbridge will require the dementors you authorized. He says if it's much longer, he's going to need approval for overtime," she said.

Cornelius felt an icy knot form in his stomach. "Dementors?" he said weakly, then he shook from his shock. "Find Madam Umbridge! I want to see her right away! Go personally to her home if you have to, but find her!"

His secretary squeaked in fear, nodded, then withdrew from the room.

"Bugger it all," Fudge muttered. "What is that blasted woman up to?"

Kitchen Hall, Campbeltown Weyr, June 21st...

Sirius entered the hall and spotted Dan and Emma sitting at one of the tables. He grabbed a cup of tea and a doughnut, then he walked over to the table and sat down.

Emma gave him a sympathetic look. "It's been a long day for all of us," she said.

Sirius nodded. "I just came back from Gringault with Hagrid. He's been caring for the injured dragons in Polenth's clan. The wizards never got down far enough to attack the city, but they are housing all those soldiers tonight. Tomorrow they expect to walk up the tunnels to Diagon Alley. The goblins didn't like the mess they were creating. Fortunately, some of the brighter officers set their men cleaning up their area. So that's a crisis averted."

"Soldiers in the field are never the fastidious sort. How are the dragons that Hagrid is dealing with?" asked Dan.

Sirius grinned. "He has a new job for you. One of the poor dragons got hit with a blasting curse in the mouth. Knocked out a bunch of teeth. Hagrid wants to know if anything can be done. He thinks some of the teeth might not grow back."

Dan looked startled. "I'll arrange to visit there tomorrow. Maybe we can make some sort of partial denture setup."

Emma smiled at her husband. He was really quite good and very adept with his hands. If anyone could custom fashion false teeth for a dragon, it would be him.

"So have all the riders turned in?" Sirius asked. "I didn't see many lights on when I overflowed their quarters and the social hall was dark."

Emma grimaced. "They turned in all right, but not before Harry had words with that Chapman fellow. I swear that boy must be thick. He was going on and on about how the riders took the cowardly way out today in not fighting the Wizards and that if he had been in charge, they would have fought. Of course, if he knew Harry had been present, he wouldn't have dared speak out."

Dan chuckled, "Harry was standing in the doorway listening to the berk spout off. Chapman finally noticed that the riders were all silent and many were throwing looks at Harry. He took one look and nearly pissed himself. Harry stood there, his brow knotted together and with a scowl on his face that would peel the paint from the walls. Then he strode forward until he was right in Chapman's face. Called

him a loud mouthed moron and said that, if he had been in charge, they would be mourning the deaths of many of their dragons and riders. Then he asked Chapman to explain how he would take the dragons into tunnels that most of them can't fit into."

"Chapman stammered and backed away from Harry, who stood there, flexing his fists. I swear the very air in the room was humming. Harry stared him down for a full silent minute, then he muttered that he wasn't worth the effort and spun on his heel and left the room. At that point, the riders tore into Chapman."

Sirius shook his head. "I don't understand that guy. Harry has cut him so many breaks. Sooner or later he's going to slug him. He just keeps on pushing."

Dan shrugged and glanced over at Emma, who had a puzzled expression on her face. "It's a guy thing, Em. The problem is normally it takes two to play the game. Chapman keeps pushing, hoping Harry will back down. He doesn't understand that Harry isn't playing. The one thing Harry will not back down from is what he considers his responsibility."

"Has anyone seen Remus?" Sirius asked suddenly.

Emma looked up and grinned knowingly. "He and Mildred went off on Spath somewhere. She had her telescope all bundled for a trip Between. For all I know, they could be off to Disko for some star gazing."

"That's an interesting way to chat up a bird," Sirius muttered.

"Indeed," agreed Dan. "I never thought of that, but footie worked well enough on Emma."

"Dan!" Emma exclaimed, her face flaming.

Dan winced and cringed.

Sirius laughed and finished his doughnut. "Well, then, I'm off to bed myself. It's been a long day for me too."

Campbeltown Weyr, June 22nd...

Harry woke slowly. He was leaning against Cheki with just a sheet to protect him from the sands of Cheki's bed.

He sat up and groaned. Every muscle in his body seemed to ache. He had tried sleeping in his bed but finally gave up and joined Chekiath, needing the physical closeness as well as the mental bond.

"Good morning, Harry," Cheki said softly. "Trath and Selanth bespoke to me this morning to let me know all the injured dragons slept well during the night."

He stood and stretched. "That's good news at least."

"Trath also said that fifty people were killed by the demons. He said that one of the Lady Holder's protectors had told May about it. May also said over two hundred people were pulled from their clutches and moved to safety. The Lady Holder is most pleased about that."

Harry nodded absently, then he turned to Chekiath. "Do you think a couple of dragons could take Ranglieth Between?"

Chekiath turned his large head towards Harry and his eyes whirled with a faint yellow. "I am certain we can."

Harry nodded and reached for his book. "I think we should also get the names of the dragons killed at Gringotts. Maybe have the names inscribed on a plaque or something. I don't want to forget those who died for us."

Chekiath gave a rumble of approval and Harry scribbled the items in his to do list. With that done, he started kicking off his shoes and socks as he walked to the bathroom. "I'm going to take a quick shower, Cheki, then we'll go for our jog."

"All right, Harry."

An hour and another shower later, he stepped into the Kitchen Hall, feeling almost normal. He made a beeline for the tea and poured himself a cup, then he went to take a seat. A moment later, Lord Mills sat down at his table.

"How are you this morning, Harry?" he asked.

Harry smiled weakly. "I'll be better when I finish this," he said, lifting his cup.

"Harry," Lord Mills started softly, "you and your riders are going to hear this a lot, but thank you for yesterday. If it weren't for your dragons, I fear we might have awoken to a nation in mourning. Most of the Royal family were in the castle yesterday. It would have been a major blow to the people."

Harry looked over at James and nodded slowly. As much help as James had provided to the Weyr, Harry had to remind himself that his ultimate loyalty remained firmly fixed on Queen and country. "I'm glad we were able to help. I'm especially thankful to the dragons. Without their ability to see the dementors, we wouldn't have been able to hold them off."

"Nevertheless, you and your dragons saved the Queen and the country from a far greater disaster," James said. "So, thank you."

Harry blushed and nodded. He wasn't the only rider there and accepting the profound thanks of a man he admired and liked made him distinctly uncomfortable.

"Harry," James said gently. "for better or worse, you are the public face of the Weyr. People will credit you, or blame you, for things your riders do. Learn to accept that fact. If Her Majesty's government decides to thank you in a meaningful manner, accept it for all of your dragons. Each time something like this happens, you are one step closer to total acceptance."

Harry stared at James in shock for a moment, considering what he said, then he nodded. It wasn't exactly the way he was raised and praise always made him uncomfortable, but for his dragons he'd do anything.

James grinned, then he pointed to the breakfast buffet. "You better go get breakfast before the girls come in and give you a hard time about it."

Harry grimaced and stood. He didn't really want to invoke their ire again. All of the girls seemed to take it upon themselves to make

sure he ate properly. He was certain Hermione, or maybe May, was writing down what he ate and counting the calories.

He sat back down with a full tray just as the doors opened and a bunch of tired riders came into the Hall.

Harry nodded to them as they sat down around him, then he dug into his breakfast.

Remus entered the Hall and walked over to the television that was installed but rarely used. He turned it on and everyone settled into silence while a news reporter talked about a dangerous terrorist cell that had been discovered in London. It was believed that the terrorists had a sizable cache of Sarin, a deadly nerve gas.

Remus muted the television after a moment, then he turned to the faces looking at him. "For those who don't know it, the building they are talking about is the same building that the Ministry of Magic resides in. I'm not quite sure what the deal is with this gas business, but it has everyone scared enough that they have evacuated everyone in a four block area around the Ministry building."

"Are we going to be involved in that?" asked Michelle. It was clear the very idea frightened her.

Harry shook his head. "No Michelle. In fact, your Wing will help the Weyr today by going to Disko to help the goblins move back into their city. Ronan will take Wing One to Gringault to help dismount the arriving goblins. I will also ask that four riders from Wing Two go relieve May and those helping her so that they can come home, change, shower and relax a bit. Personally, I have a meeting this morning with the Prime Minister, but unless something unforeseen crops up, there are no plans to involve us in taking down the Ministry."

Draco nodded. "Makes sense. The Ministry is underground. Short of tearing the building down, we couldn't get to them."

"That's right. What's happening in London will undoubtedly be part of my discussion with the Prime Minister today. But we're not able to help with this. On another note, I would like to tell each of you how proud I am of your actions yesterday. The attack on the Queen

caught us by surprise, but we responded well and saved lives," Harry said. "Those of you who cast the patronus charm, well done!"

Around the hall the riders sat up straighter and looked at each other with pride.

Harry turned back to his meal, while at another table, several others conversed in low tones.

"He leads them and gives them greater pride in themselves, yet it still bothers him," Minerva said in wonder.

"I have no doubt he will grow out of it. Even now it bothers him less than it did when the riders were first chosen. His bond is forcing him to mature very quickly, but he still finds time to be a teenager. If you get the opportunity, you should see him when he brings out his model airplane."

Minerva arched an eyebrow at Albus. She knew what an airplane was but had never considered them as potential toys.

"He's playing with toys?"

Albus shook his head. "In a way, I suppose that's true, but it's more than just that, Minerva. He's reached out and made friends with Ronan Clark, his Wing Second. Ronan introduced Harry to the idea of a muggle hobby. It's a pastime muggles engage in. The muggles recognize the need for an outlet and they find such an outlet in various hobbies. Mr. Clark happened to inherit his father's love of small model airplanes that really fly and he has been teaching it to Harry."

Albus paused and smiled at her. "I confess, it's rather refreshing to see Harry just enjoying himself. The only time we saw that at school was when he was flying his broom. Not even Quidditch made him as happy as just flying his broom."

Minerva nodded thoughtfully, then she motioned towards the television. "What happens now?"

Albus glanced up at the television and his expression turned grim. "I fear we are in for an uncomfortable time ahead. I believe you will return to Hogwarts and assume your rightful position as

Headmistress. But I also know the muggles will want changes made to what we teach. I daresay you will have many muggle teachers working with you. In fact, you might even end up sharing your position with a muggle who oversees the muggle subjects. At first I thought it was foolish to teach things like English and Mathematics, but our wizard students have flourished and vastly improved both in their general demeanor and in their spell casting."

"As for myself, I will probably find myself in a position much like the one I'm in now; an advisor to the people in charge."

"Advisor you might be, but you've been a great help to everyone, Albus," Minerva retorted.

He smiled at her. "I know, but as the saying goes, the view is different from the Quidditch coaches' bench."

He glanced down at his watch. "Alas, I must get ready for my visit to the Prime Minister's office. I think I'll go with a gold colored leisure suit this time. For some reason, the purple seemed to attract a lot of attention last time."

Ministry of Magic, London, June 22nd...

Fudge appeared in the executive arrival room and brushed off his suit fussily. Satisfied that he was well dressed, he exited the room and paused when he entered the atrium. For this time of the morning, it was surprisingly empty.

Coming in the way he did, he was unaware of the fuss happening over his head and he was unaware of the fact that a good sixty percent of the Ministry who did not have access to the executive arrival room were now in the custody of the Muggles. A few had arrived in the alley as usual, hidden from the muggles and attempted to fight back. Those wizards had been shot, but none had been killed yet.

Fudge noted the night guard was still on duty and he looked exhausted. "Did someone declare a holiday?" he demanded.

The man, barely above squib level, blinked in shock. The Minister had never spoken to him in all of his twenty years on the job.

"Maybe it's a flu," he said with a shrug. "My relief never showed up and I can't find the day supervisor."

Fudge scowled and turned away, walking briskly to his office. He noted unhappily that his secretary wasn't at her desk, and that meant there would be no morning tea!

He stepped into his office and sat for a moment, then he glanced down at the calendar on his desk. He had written in a comment about Skeeter and remembered he was supposed to speak with her this morning. Glancing around, he frowned and straightened out his desk.

Meanwhile, in the Alley apparation point, Rita Skeeter arrived and was promptly tackled to the ground. The British Army had been told that wizards abhor physical violence and didn't react well to it. The shock of being tackled by two burly soldiers was enough to stun most wizards into giving up without a fight. Unfortunately for Skeeter, she was swept up in the government nets.

In Diagon alley, the clock had just struck nine in the morning when the doors to Gringotts opened wide and a mixed group of goblins and British Army surged from the building. Shocked wizards stood helplessly as wizards and muggles in soldier uniforms and goblins went about disarming every wizard in the alley.

At the same time, an army ordnance unit finished wiring up the entrance to the Ministry of Magic to a large cache of explosives. A Major gave the ordnance specialist a thumbs up, and with a deft twist of the handle on a detonator, the phone booths hiding the entrance exploded, exposing a gaping hole in the ground.

Four companies of royal marines ran forward and after dropping several grenades in the open hole, started to enter the subterranean complex.

It would take more than twelve hours to declare the building secured, but they would find little resistance.

#10 Downing Street, London, June 22nd...

It was a puzzled Harry that followed James and Albus into the Prime Minister's office. On the way to the administration building where he

would portkey with the others, he ran into May and Hermione coming back from Balmoral Castle. Both girls took a long hard look at him and flushed noticeably. Why they did that puzzled him. He was wearing the suit that James had given him, although it was now tight across his shoulders.

Privately, Harry thought his suit looked cool, even if it was a bit uncomfortable. He couldn't understand why it would cause anyone to blush though. James also thought Harry looked good in his suit, but as a father himself, he could tell the suit was already too tight for the lad. He made a mental note to see about replacing it as soon as possible.

The secretary looked up and smiled when they entered the room. "The Prime Minister is waiting gentlemen. Please go in," she said brightly.

The three entered the luxurious office and Harry was surprised to see the Prime Minister stand and rush around his desk with an outstretched hand. He grabbed Harry's hand and shook it warmly. "Weyrleader, on behalf of Her Majesty's government, I want to thank you for your actions yesterday. We suffered a terrible loss, but a far greater tragedy was averted thanks to you and your dragons. Her Majesty is very grateful for your efforts and she shares your grief for the dragons who were lost in yesterday's action."

Harry blinked in surprise and he glanced at James, who nodded knowingly to him. He had been warned this sort of thing would happen. "Thank you, sir," he replied quietly.

Major motioned to the chairs. "Please have a seat and we can talk."

Once they were settled, Major turned to the other two. "Gentlemen, your aid to our government has helped this unfortunate business conclude in a satisfactory manner. I have been informed by our forces in the field that Diagon Alley and Hogsmeade are being patrolled by our forces. There were no injuries in either of those actions.

"The assault at the Ministry hasn't quite concluded, but Minister Fudge has been arrested and is currently being held in a warded cell. We had a few minor injuries there, but nothing too serious."

He glanced at his watch. "I expect Mr. Croaker will be joining us shortly, so we'll be able to discuss the reformation of the Ministry of Magic as a subdivision under the Home Office. I expect things to be rather chaotic for a while, but I'm certain we'll sort things out. We got rather lucky that our cover story managed to scare the press away. They were afraid to even overfly the area in helicopters because of the Sarin scare."

"I'm afraid I don't understand that, sir," Albus said, his confusion evident. "What is Sarin?"

Major looked at him for a moment, then he leaned back in his chair. "You perhaps recall the first great war of this century? World War One?"

"I recall hearing about it, but we didn't get involved much with the muggle wars. Our great war with Grindelwald occurred at the same time as your second world war, but it had little to do with your conflict," Albus replied.

"In the first world war, the opposing sides invented a series of gases which could incapacitate or kill. One weapon could release enough gas to kill a great number of people, and depending on which way the wind was blowing, it attacked soldiers and civilians alike."

He looked up to see both Harry and Dumbledore nodding in understanding. "As far as gases go, they were very primitive compared to today's gas weapons. Sarin is a very dangerous gas that can kill you without you breathing it in. All it need do is touch your skin, it's that dangerous, and people are afraid of it. By claiming we were dealing with a terrorist group that had the gas in quantity, we scared people enough that they willingly evacuated their homes and businesses. That gave us the opportunity to work without worrying about exposing your world."

Major's expression hardened. "Please understand one important thing, Mr. Dumbledore. Your society cannot hide much longer. The world is too big and too pervasive for you to hide forever. One of the key tasks of the new Ministry will be to plan out a phased and intelligent approach to exposing your world to ours."

Dumbledore nodded. He had already figured that out for himself and had spent the better part of his time with Croaker warning him of what was to come.

Satisfied that the message was understood, the Prime Minister consulted his notes. "From what we know, yesterday's action resulted in forty two of our soldiers killed in action and another eighty six wounded. For the goblins, there were two hundred killed and over four hundred wounded, and six dragons killed and sixteen injured.

"Additionally, fifty one people were killed in the attack on Balmoral Castle. Over two hundred survived the attack in the parking lot. These people have been temporarily held in custody while we try to convince them to keep what they saw secret."

Major held up a hand as Dumbledore opened his mouth. "We are aware of the memory erasing spells you wizards have available, but we consider it a major invasion of personal privacy. We will not resort to those spells unless absolutely necessary."

Harry leaned back in his chair and nodded. The wizard impulse to obliviate any muggle always seemed wrong to him.

Major looked up and smiled. "The numbers are high, too high, but on the other hand they could have been a whole lot worse. I personally reviewed the security camera feeds from the castle this morning. The," he paused and looked again at Dumbledore, "dementors you call them?"

Dumbledore nodded.

"Very well, the dementors did not show up on normal cameras, but they did show up on the thermal cameras as bright cold spots. Near as we can determine, there were close to one hundred of them attacking the buses unloading in the parking lot when the dragons appeared."

Major turned to Harry at that point. "How many dragons did you call up?"

"All of them, sir," Harry replied a bit sheepishly. "The Queen was in danger and I wasn't picky. With the exception of the dragons

involved in moving goblins, I called up all the rest, a bit over seven thousand."

Major smiled at Harry. "Well, that explains why our thermal sensors went a little wonky for a while. I've been told that parts of the parking lot are going to have to be dug up and resurfaced where the dragon fire vaporized holes right down to the underlying concrete."

Harry flushed. "Sir, I," he began, squirming slightly.

"No, Weyrleader, we understand why that was necessary. But one of the reasons why I did ask you to come here surfaced this morning when reviewing the tapes," Major said, then he paused as the door opened and Croaker stepped inside.

"Well?" asked Major, looking at the man pointedly.

"They are still searching the building and I've warned them to stay away from my old department because it's heavily trapped, but I would say you've taken care of the Ministry of Magic. It has ceased to exist."

"Good enough. We'll be working on that later today, but there are still a few issues I'd like to clear up," Major said, then he picked up a remote control and turned on the television in the corner of the room.

The broadcast image vanished and in its place was a high quality image of Harry on the back of a glowing dragon. Everyone watched in silence as the dragon swooped down and picked up a large woman who had been kneeling just in front of the forest's edge. Harry and his dragon vanished and the camera swerved around trying to reacquire him. When it did find him again, there was no sign of the woman.

Major paused the playback and turned to Harry. "Weyrleader?"

Harry shrugged. "I don't know who she was, but she shot a killing curse at me. It missed by a mile, but Cheki, sorry Chekiath, my dragon, spotted her. I couldn't ignore her and hope her aim wouldn't improve, so we took her Between."

"Between?" echoed Major looking at Harry in confusion.

"If I may, sir," James said. "When those wizards attacked the Weyr in Kenya, the Weyrleader had the eight wizards he had captured taken Between. The dragons grab their target with their front legs, swoop up and go Between. While Between, the dragon simply lets go of his passenger, then pops back. For those left behind, it's a death sentence."

Major nodded, his suspicions confirmed. "And this killing curse is exactly what it sounds like? An attack with deadly force?"

"The Killing Curse is considered an unforgivable curse by the Ministry," Albus said. "It merits an automatic life sentence for casting it, and a dementor's kiss if someone is actually killed by it. A direct hit on a dragon would have little effect, though many hits, simultaneously, would do the job. With humans, however, one hit, whether it be a glancing blow or a direct shot, will kill instantly."

Major nodded, satisfied in his mind. If pressed, his office could always claim Harry's actions were justified.

"Could you play that image again?" asked Croaker. "I think I recognized her."

Major looked surprised, then he picked up the control and rewound the tape. He replayed it, then froze the image where the woman was looking directly up at Chekiath.

Croaker chuckled and turned to Dumbledore. "That's one we won't have to worry about," he said, all but chortling.

Dumbledore stood and walked over to the television. He bent down and examined the image closer. "That is Madam Umbridge, the Senior Undersecretary of Magic," he announced.

Major glanced over at Harry.

"I never met her so I couldn't say," Harry said, shrugging.

Major nodded and made a note on a pad. "Very well. Lord Mills, Weyrleader, we won't keep you long today, but I'm afraid we're going to be borrowing Mr Dumbledore for the foreseeable future."

Harry looked worriedly at Dumbledore.

"It's fine Harry," the old man said reassuringly. "I knew this would probably happen and I have spoken with Remus about taking over my tutoring."

Harry nodded and looked relieved. Despite what he had told his riders, he had been worried that the government would need them for some action relating to the Ministry. "I realize that you'll probably go back full time to wizarding world, Albus. They need you and it wouldn't be fair of us to hold you back, but you and Fawkes will always have a home with us."

Dumbledore smiled broadly and considered just how much his relationship with Harry had changed. "Thank you, Harry. You have no idea how happy that makes me feel."

Prime Minister Major looked between the two for a moment, then he turned his attention back to Harry.

"Weyrleader, I expect at some point the Queen will want to meet again with you and your riders, but unless there is anything new to discuss, I'll let you return to your Weyr," he said. "I still have some business to attend to with Lord Mills. My office will arrange for his transportation back to Campbeltown."

"There is one point of business I did want to mention, sir," Harry said carefully, then he blushed a little. "Some new information has come to light concerning the requirements for rider candidates. Please inform the Americans that we think it's best to restrict the candidates to age fifteen through twenty. It wasn't understood at the time of the first impression, but we now suspect that when our dragons rise for their first mating flight, usually twelve to thirteen months after hatching, the sexual activity of the dragons involved may force the riders to become sexually active as well. For this reason, I'm restricting the rider candidates to age fifteen or above."

"Any candidates we find younger than that can be recorded and offered a chance to impress when they reach age fifteen."

Major looked surprised for a moment, then he made another quick note. "I see," he said uncomfortably. "Harry," he said carefully, not wanting to offend, "a number of your riders are underage, one in particular." He paused and opened a file and pulled out a document.

"Miss Susan Bones is an orphan who has no guardian. We considered making her a ward of the Crown, but there is another option that we have available and want to try first."

"Sir?" asked Harry.

Major pulled out an envelope and handed it to Harry. "Would you deliver that to Mrs. Granger? It's a request from the Crown that she and her husband take up the role of Miss Bones' legal guardian. The Crown recognizes that Lord Black is your guardian. As such, we leave the issues of sex and sex education in the hands of the parent or guardian."

Harry smiled and accepted the letter. "That's a wonderful idea. I'm sure Emma and Dan will do that."

Major nodded. "Good, but I want you to understand that the details of your private lives are to remain private. Legally, a fourteen year old having sex is illegal in this country. Not that it doesn't happen, you understand. It does and quite often. However, if it's brought to the attention of the authorities, it's a crime. I understand we're dealing with issues that the law wasn't designed for. Let's not require a court case to set a precedent."

"I understand, sir," Harry replied. He was relieved that he wouldn't have to face the legal hassle. It had been worrying him almost as much as the actual act itself.

Major stood and offered Harry his hand again.

Harry quickly stood and took his hand.

"Thank you again for your quick action yesterday. I suppose you and your riders are going to take a break today?"

Harry's tone softened. "Actually, as soon as we're done moving the goblins back to their city, I'm taking the Weyr back to Balmoral Castle."

"Why?"

He sighed, "Polenth, the senior dragon of the underground dragons, is dealing with their dead, but Ranglieth is my responsibility. At Lac

Logipi, I ordered the dead dragons burned. It was wrong of me, but I was very angry and I wanted to make sure another group of wizards didn't come by and carve those dragons up for potion ingredients.

"Ranglieth will be taken Between by members of his clan. We shall honor his passing in a manner befitting a dragon who gave his life in the defense of others," Harry said quietly.

"Very fitting. I wish I could be there. Please convey to your dragons my deepest condolences, Weyrleader," Major said softly.

Harry nodded, then he gave Albus and James a weak smile before leaving the room.

Major waited until the door was firmly closed then he turned to James. "About that matter you brought to my attention."

James suddenly looked very interested. "Yes?"

"Her Majesty had some people make a few discrete inquiries before she met with the Weyrleader, so CID already had a case ongoing. Doctor Shepard's report kicked that into high gear. I have been reliably informed that we can expect arrests no later than the middle of next month."

"Excuse me, but may I ask what you are discussing?" asked Albus.

Major glanced at him, then looked back to James, who nodded.

"I'm sure Albus already suspects," he told the Prime Minister.

"Harry's guardians are being investigated for child abuse, Mr. Dumbledore. We are working hard to build a case that won't require Harry to testify, but that still may be necessary," Major said.

Dumbledore sighed and wiped a hand over his face. "James is right. I knew he didn't have it easy there, but I didn't know it was that bad."

"Well, it turns out that they were receiving money every month, both from the estate and from the government. We've decided to perform an audit and ask for them to prove they spent the money on Harry. That will open the door to further charges," Major said.

"Does Harry know about this investigation?" asked Albus.

Major shook his head. "No, and I hope to keep it that way. Roughly one out of every three cases needs to have the victim testify, so maybe he'll be one of the luckier ones."

Albus nodded unhappily and turned to Croaker, who had been listening with wide eyes. "Another one of my less than stellar ideas, old friend. I'll explain later."

James stood, knowing his part in the meeting was over.

"I'll walk you out, Lord Mills. I want to tell my secretary something. Gentlemen, I'll be back in a few minutes," Major said.

The rise of the Weyr to a position of power during the early part of the twenty first century has been described by some experts as a confluence of economic and technological progress. While these experts might be correct in their views, they have forgotten that there was one single dominant force drive the Weyrs to the world stage. The Weyrleader and his dragon are the sole reason behind their rise to prominence and no confluence can change that fact.

Excerpted from The Weyrs of Earth by Remus John Lupin, published 2040.

Author's Notes and Mockeries!

- Just one more chapter to go folks! The follow up to QWF is being written, but I want to be at least eight chapters ahead before we start publishing. I will ask that people don't beg for updates, or attempt to prod me to hurry up. I'm a notoriously stubborn bastard and liable to slow down when prodded.

- Rosa Mundi, sorry, but Neville will not come to the Weyr. We will see him, briefly again in the next book, but we won't be taking anyone else from Hogwarts that you know.

- Mantiswizard, it always gives us a chuckle when someone finds we've used their home area in a story. All I can say is hello to you in Russia, and keep an eye out for dragons.

- Dream Pyre, I think that one thing that people tend to forget is that the riders have dragons in their heads and the dragons are maturing much faster than their riders. This is having a maturing influence on the riders and making them a bit more perceptive than they normally would be.

As to the roles, well Millicent Bulstrode and Wayne Hopkins hope to become scientists. Karen Khan is looking to be the biz wiz for the Weyr and Susan Bones is heading toward the role of Head Woman who organized everything in the Weyr. No one has any real idea of what they are planning on doing and the fact that they are riders seriously crimps a lot of career choices. As far as the boys and model planes... hell I'm over 50 years old and would love to play with RC airplanes. Boys and their toys, it's universal.

- O_Jordino_O left a rather offensive review because he seems to think soldiers are saints, then he stormed off to have a private temper tantrum. Yawn. Next please.

- Hermione, oh lord Hermione. There are people that love her, and people that hate her. Let's just say that nothing will be solved by the end of this part of the tale. Like all good teen love stories, there will be emo angst and hair pulling tension. It ain't over by a long shot and when it's all settled I think the outcome will surprise some of you.

- Impatientuser wants to know how powerful Harry is. He's Voldemort's equal. That means he measures four bananas and twelve coconuts on the magic power scale I just invented. Harry is powerful and losing interest in magic since his world will be more tied to the muggle one. He can't hide a flight of dragons in fog bank, but he can hum the Benny Hill theme while hopping on one foot. Even Hermione can't do that.

Magic is part of Harry and he won't ignore it completely, but it will never assume top focus like it once had. He's not going to abandon it, but his dragons come first and if that means skipping magic class to take care of them so be it.

- I am not British. I talk normally and drink coffee, eat cookies and don't add extra letters to my words. If you want these stories converted into British you'll just have to go elsewhere. In fact, just to annoy you annoying Brit Pickers, MY HARRY speaks with a Brooklyn accent. "Yo! Hermiony! Get ova heer gurl!"

- I'll end the notes with a strange observation. I can understand a reviewer quoting a line they found poignant or funny, but I'm baffled by some people who quote whole sections back to us. I mean, we wrote the file, we know what's there. Why repeat it back?

Standard Disclaimer:

"WAAAAAA it's over!" wailed Alyx.

Bob glanced up from his keyboard and frowned. "What are you complaining about now? You get a couple weeks of no editing."

"But the story is over!" wailed Alyx again.

"The story is over, but the tale isn't. There's still a lot to do and Harry hasn't gotten laid yet!"

"Damn straight! I want to get laid!" Harry yelled from the first row in the theater.

Bob shot him a glare and Harry cringed back. He knew not to annoy the author or he might end up writing a scene where Harry gets caught publicly masturbating with a sock puppet and a bowl of creamed corn.

"But what am I supposed to do until you start handing me new chapters," Alyx moaned.

Bob turned back to her. "Have you sharpened all your saw blades and drill bits? Fine tuned your laser cutter and refilled your gas cylinders for your torch?" he asked.

"I've done all that, plus I've warmed up all my branding irons. I've even brushed out all the knots from the llamas!" she exclaimed. "And the wax is simmering wonderfully."

"Well you're just going to have to find yourself something to do. I'm busy working on the next book," Bob said with a sigh, then he turned back to his computer.

"Are you done yet?" Alyx asked hopefully after a minute.

"No," Bob said with a sigh.

"Are you done yet?" Alyx asked hopefully after another minute.

"No," Bob repeated with a greater sigh.

"Are you done yet?" Alyx asked hopefully after another minute.

Bob reached down with one hand and pulled a plunger out of a drawer. With a practiced toss it hit Alyx in the face, covering her mouth. She started tugging frantically on it and glaring at Bob.

He looked at the audience and shrugged. "I knew there was a reason for using super glue on that thing. Enjoy the last chapter folks, I'm off to write part two."

As the curtain closed on this story, Alyx was last seen making obscene finger gestures and mocking Bob with her Queen Victoria sock puppet.

As the superior magical species on the planet, we have the divine right to cultivate the lesser magical breeds for our purposes. But divine right also implies divine responsibility, meaning that we must work to ensure species like dragons, unicorns, and even house elves, survive and thrive so that they are always there for our use.

Excerpt from *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find them* by Newt Scamander. Published 1927.

Balmoral Castle, June 22nd...

May knelt in the grass next to Narth and she gently laid the two large pieces of metal along his front right leg. Alice Wagner bound it tightly using heavy, padded rope to immobilize the leg. Narth moaned softly and Hermione scrambled to pour more pain potion into his mouth. Hermione and May had returned to the castle to help with the dragons shortly after Harry had left for his meeting.

May had brought Hermione back with her because she knew a spell that could tell if a bone was broken. Hermione was learning healer spells from Doctor Sheppard, who wasn't trained as a healer, but had managed to study and pick up a lot of the spells on his own.

Narth was far too big to take to the doctor's office for an x-ray. Besides, the x-ray machine they leased was far too small to x-ray a dragon. Hermione was genuinely concerned about Narth. He had helped her learn to fly without being terrified, and he had so many interesting memories of early Britain. He might not be her bonded dragon, but he was her friend and her friend was hurt.

For May, she was still tired, but feeling better. A shower and a change of clothing left her feeling more human and able to return to the castle to help the dragons. Having the tent to sleep in was nice, but all her clothes were still back in Campbeltown.

Most of the injuries from the battle at Balmoral were the result of dragons crashing into the ground. Narth was the worst injured since he crashed into a parked car and managed to pick up a number of puncture wounds on top of a broken right foreleg and a wrenched wing joint.

Alice leaned back after tying off the wrap. "There, May. It's bound as best as we can do."

May leaned back and sighed in relief. Hermione's spells had confirmed the break. Between the three of them, they were able to set the bone and Hermione used a spell to immobilize the leg long enough for them to put the splint in place. Now that it was bound, all they could do is wait and periodically check it. Narth would be wearing the splint for at least six weeks.

She wasn't happy with their efforts, but it was better than it had been. It wouldn't surprise her to discover that Narth would always have problems and some pain from that leg.

Hagrid was studying and applying to the dragons any healing spells he could find, but the bone mending spells never worked on them and he was afraid to try skelegrow on one.

"You're going to be fine, Narth. I'm sorry we'll have to let your leg heal naturally," May said.

The Welsh Green turned his large head to look at May. His eyes slowly twirled with streaks of yellow and black. It was, according to Harry, the closest color mix the dragons had to show unhappiness. "Thank you, Weyrhealer. You and your helpers have a very gentle touch." Narth said. He knew that had his injury happened just a year ago, it would have resulted in his death. Any injury that resulted in loss of movement would have meant the wizards would have been able to catch him and as a wild dragon he would have been killed out of hand.

May stood and pat the large dragon. "We'll do what we can to make you as comfortable as possible."

"I know you will," replied Narth. "You honor me with your caring."

Narth suddenly turned to look skyward. "The Weyr comes!" he announced with a trumpeted bellow. It was only his bound leg that prevented the large dragon from knocking May and Hermione over.

Almost instantly, all of the dragons in the Weyr appeared overhead. An alarm at the castle rang at the sight of so many dragons. Harry made a gesture and the individual wings peeled off and came in to land in neat groups.

May, Hermione and Alice stepped out from under the tarp they had erected over Narth and watched silently, wondering why Harry had brought the entire Weyr back to Balmoral Castle.

Once all of the wings had landed, Harry lightly stepped down from Chekiath and he approached Hagrid. The pair walked over to the spot where Ranglieth still lay. Harry placed his hand against the dragon and bowed his head for a minute.

From around the back of the castle, several large trucks moved towards the cluster of riders and their dragons. They stopped a few dozen yards away and soldiers poured out of the back of them, quickly falling into formation.

Meanwhile, Hagrid gently lifted the front of Ranglieth and Harry stepped into the space to place something on the ground, then he canceled the shrinking spell on the object and watched as it grew in size. It was a twenty foot long pole, the thickness of a telephone pole. They repeated the process in the back, placing another pole just in front of Ranglieth's rear legs. Heavy ropes were tied to both ends of the poles. Harry and Hagrid stretched out the ropes so that the dragons would be able to easily grab them without interfering with another dragon.

With that done, Harry finally noticed the soldiers, and the Queen standing respectfully nearby, surrounded by her security detail.

Harry walked over towards the Queen and sketched a polite bow. "Your Majesty, with your permission, we'd like to attend to our friend."

"A moment, Weyrleader," the Queen murmured, then she glanced over to the assembled soldiers and nodded to the officer in charge. A young captain barked an order of attention and the soldiers stiffened in place. "You may proceed now," she said to Harry.

Harry nodded and he turned to Chekiath. "All right, Cheki. Let's do this."

"Yes, Harry,"

Chekiath trumpeted and then strode forward until he could pick up the rope in his front paws, then he reared back on his hind legs. He was joined by Momnarth, Norendrath and Selanth, who copied his movements. All four dragons poised on their hind legs, wings spreading out and their muscles bunched tightly. Chekiath trumpeted again and the four dragons sprang aloft as one.

Harry and the assembled riders bowed their heads in respect and the dragons began a low keening. Just as the four dragons leapt skyward a pair of bagpipers began to play 'Amazing Grace'. The four dragons hovered for a few brief seconds about ten feet off the ground with Ranglieth suspended between them, then they jumped Between. Harry was puzzled by their maneuver but there was no time to figure it out.

When the four dragons reappeared, Ranglieth and the poles were gone. Chekiath and the other three dragons came to a landing close to Harry and the Queen. The dragons and the riders stood respectful and unmoving, while the pipes played out their song.

As soon as the pipes ended, the Queen watched in surprise as the riders turned to their dragons for comfort. Even Harry leaned against Chekiath, who joined the others in keening for the dead dragon. This, more than any single thing she had heard or seen in regards to the dragons, drove home the point of just how unique and how strong the bond was between rider and dragon.

Harry knew the Queen was nearby, so he straightened and gave his dragon one final pat. "Duty calls, Cheki," he sent.

"I know. Talk to the Lady Holder. I can be as strong as you," replied Chekiath.

Harry turned to the Queen. "Ma'am, thank you for allowing us to send Ranglieth on."

The Queen held up a hand. "Nonsense. He died protecting our subjects and our person. It is only fitting that we were here to see this and to honor him and his Weyr. The Prime Minister's office called this morning saying you would be here to do this and it was important that we attend. Your dragon died protecting us and we shall always remember that."

"We are honored you could be here, Ma'am," Harry said softly, "With your permission, we'll withdraw now."

The Queen nodded hesitantly. She looked as though she wanted to say something, then she changed her mind.

Harry turned to Chekiath. "Let's get them mounted, Cheki. It's time to go home."

"Yes, Harry."

Chekiath turned towards Spath and Harry could hear Chekiath giving orders for the wings to get aloft. He marveled over the fact that his dragon was giving more and more orders to dragons far older than he was.

Spath and Momnarth still held considerable authority among the dragons, but one fact was certain. The Weyrleader's dragon was exerting his own authority now.

He climbed up into his position, then he pumped his fist twice and the bonded pairs leapt into the air. The Queen stood and watched as the riders went Between, then she turned and walked back towards the castle. There was much still to do, and there were others who needed to be recognized for their part in yesterday's action.

The Burrow, Ottery St. Catchpole, June 23rd...

Molly Weasley rolled out of bed very unhappy. Arthur had come home late at night from his job before, but he always called to let her know he would be late. Until yesterday.

By late afternoon on the twenty second, the Wizarding Wireless Network was reporting strange activity at the Ministry building, then it fell silent.

She got on the floo and called Sarah Diggory and they spoke for a while, but neither woman had any clue what was happening. Finally, around six in the evening, both women found themselves violently ejected from the floo when it too ceased to operate.

At that point, owls or visiting were the only options available to her and she didn't want to leave the Burrow in case Arthur came home.

She threw on a housecoat and shuffled from the bedroom, heading to the kitchen.

She paused at the bottom of the stairs and looked at her twins in surprise. Both of them were asleep in the chairs and looked like they had been up most of the night.

She walked over to one of them. "Fred," she said, shaking him slightly. His eyes sprang open and he immediately stood up.

"Oi! Fred!" George said. "We nodded off!"

Fred opened his eyes. "Dad home?" he asked.

George glanced at Molly, who shook her head.

"Have you been sitting here waiting for your father?" she asked.

Both boys nodded. "Something bad happened yesterday, mum. George and I thought you'd rest easier if we waited up for dad."

She smiled weakly. "Well, hopefully he'll be here for breakfast. Be good boys and fetch in some eggs from the hen house."

Fred nodded. "Sure, mum. We'll to that now."

She walked into the kitchen and absently noted Errol sitting on the back of a chair with an undelivered note still attached. With a trembling hand, she untied the note she had sent to Percy and placed it on the table, then she sat down.

The twins came in from outside with the eggs. Both of them were shocked to see their mum sitting and staring at the rolled up note. Molly Weasley was a very strong woman, but the pillar from which her strength came was her husband.

All around Britain, families were missing loved ones who worked for the Ministry. Life had changed and none of them understood how or why just yet. The Weasleys were lucky. Many families had lost loved ones in the tunnels of Gringotts and it would still be days before anyone would know about it. Others, like the Weasleys, would discover their missing family members had been arrested.

Gringault, June 24th...

A honor guard preceded the Prime Minister and his entourage. They had driven to the Leaky Cauldron and gone straight to Gringotts, where they caught a plushly appointed mining car for their trip down to the goblin city.

Inside the enclosed cabin of the car there was no sensation of motion like the wizards experienced in the open cars they used to travel to the vaults. Prime Minister Major was impressed. The car was obviously designed to carry only very special people. It was richly decorated with inlaid gold leaf and sparkling gems. The cushions were of a silk like none he had ever felt before.

Once they arrived, a goblin ceremonial guard bearing Ragnok's personal seal formed up around them and led them to the central plaza where they would meet with Ragnok. Just as they approached the plaza, Chekiath appeared overhead with Harry. The large dragon glided effortlessly overhead towards the plaza, then landed.

It had been originally intended that Harry would accompany the humans down from Gringotts, but Harry said he would come with his dragon. He pointed out that while he was Weyrleader, it wouldn't do to exclude the dragons. Chekiath, as his bonded dragon, was the representative of all the dragons on Earth.

Harry wanted to include several other dragons, but eventually decided that Chekiath and Polenth, who was also attending, would suffice.

The inclusion of the dragons meant the meeting would be held in the plaza, rather than inside the palace. A bulk of the buildings in Gringault had no roofs, as it never rained and the temperature never changed. Dragons finding places on rooftops to perch would have been problematic.

Harry slid down from his spot on Chekiath and nodded cordially to Ragnok, who stood waiting for the others just entering the plaza. He turned to Polenth,

"How are your injured, Polenth?"

"Healing well, thanks to the Weyrling Master. He arranged with the goblin potioners to make the proper potions for our needs," Polenth said.

Harry smiled. "Good. You and your clan performed very well and I am proud of you and them. Please tell them I am thankful for their efforts and we share in their grief for those who were killed."

Polenth seemed to stand a bit taller and his chest puffed outwards. His eyes streaked with green and blue and they twirled slowly. Harry's praise caught him off guard and he could feel the astonishment and pride his dragons had for him and the Weyrleader's words.

"The others come, Harry," Chekiath warned.

Harry turned his attention away from Polenth in time to see John Major step up to Ragnok with Lord Mills. Mills had acted as intermediary between the British government and the goblins and he would perform that function today, as well.

"Lord Ragnok, if I may, this is Prime Minister John Major," James said.

Major stepped forward and extended his hand. "It is an honor to meet with you, Lord Ragnok. On behalf of Her Majesty, Queen Elizabeth, you have our deepest thanks in helping us bring this

conflict to a swift and successful resolution. The Queen has also commanded me to convey her personal thanks for your restraint. We understand you had it within your power to destroy the wizarding economy. We are grateful that you did not."

Ragnok shook a human hand for the second time in his life and he grinned slightly. "It was felt that you would be putting the Ministry of Magic to rights. To recall the galleons would have disrupted that effort."

Major nodded.

Ragnok gestured to the seats that were nearby and they moved to sit. Once they were seated and served drinks, Ragnok looked at Major. "You asked for this meeting, Prime Minister. May I know why?"

Major put his tea down on a table that appeared next to his chair. "My lord," he said, then he gestured to a man sitting to his right, "you know most of the people here, but this is Sir William O'Hearny, a distant cousin of Her Majesty and the new Deputy Minister of Magic. The position will be the highest position within the new Ministry and the Queen has commanded that it will always be held by a normal person, rather than a wizard.

"His task is to reshape the face of British Wizardry. His goal is to arrange it so that one day a goblin can shop in Diagon Alley and be welcomed there by the wizards and the merchants."

Ragnok blinked in surprise. "You're serious?" he exclaimed.

Major glanced over at O'Hearny and he nodded to him.

"We're very serious," O'Hearny said firmly. "My cousin is disgusted at the attitude that the wizards have been displaying and she wants it changed. We have a lot of work to do to get there, my lord, but I am convinced we can do this. The Weyrleader has, time and time again, championed the cause of his dragons as people. If we can agree to that concept, then surely we can agree that all of the sapient species are people too, no matter their form?"

Ragnok nodded slowly, then he turned to Harry. "And your position, Weyrleader?"

Harry looked down thoughtfully for a moment. "I have told Prime Minister Major that he only need ask and we'll help where we can. My goal is to establish the Weyrs and dragons such that they are a welcomed and productive member of this planet. Reconstructing the wizard society isn't the sole task of the Weyr, but we will help when and where we can.

"I have also made it known to our house elves that any elf seeking refuge can find it among the dragons. The elves may be restricted by their bondage, but that doesn't mean they have to live a life of pain and misery. I am concerned about the other races that have been cultivated for the benefit of wizards without regard to their welfare. The one thing you will be able to count on, now and for all time, Lord Ragnok, is that the dragons will always fight for the rights of a people to be a people."

Chekiath and Polenth thrummed in approval at Harry's words and Ragnok nodded slowly.

"I admit that I am surprised and pleased to hear such words. But actions speak louder than words and both the Weyr and the muggles have fought beside us in defense of the horde. That is something the wizards have never done."

Ragnok turned and pinned O'Hearnly with a glare. "We will aid you in your endeavors as much as we can, and perhaps in time we can erase centuries of suspicion and distrust."

Harry leaned back in his chair and relaxed, while Major brought up the subject of an ambassador and more formal relations between the two groups. As far as Harry was concerned, he had made his point. The Weyr would help, but rebuilding wizarding society wasn't a Weyr priority. More importantly, however, he had made it clear that the Weyr would be the champion of those races that couldn't easily speak for themselves.

CID Interrogation Room #1, June 25th...

Cornelius Fudge was a broken man. He had spent the last four days in this cell with no one to talk to or tell him what was happening. He wanted to explain to his captors that he wasn't responsible for his actions, that he was under the Imperious curse, but they didn't seem

to care enough to come talk to him. What good was an alibi if there was no one around to hear it?

The room he was in was all white, with a small cot and toilet. Bright florescent lighting added to the cold sterile feeling the room had. The door was only barely visible as a thin seam in the wall. Cornelius was unaware of the video camera hidden in the lighting fixture that recorded every comment of his and every move.

His spoken comments about his alibi had been recorded.

He had vague memories of several men bursting into his office and before he could pull his wand they pulled him to the ground. A rifle butt convinced him it was time to take a nap, When he awoke, he'd found himself on the cot in this room, wearing an ugly gray jump suit. His wand and emergency portkey had been taken from him.

Meals had been served via a slot in the door, but he never saw who delivered them. Whoever was holding him had strict orders not to socialize with him. The only words he had heard were the commands to pass the empty tray back through the slot in the door.

The door suddenly opened and he screamed in surprise and fright, then he backed away from the door and the two men standing there. A guard quickly stepped into the cell and grabbed his wrist. In fluid motions, which he had done countless times, he handcuffed Fudge, then knelt and shackled his ankles.

"You can't do this to me! I'm the Minister of Magic!" he protested.

The guard grabbed him by an arm and pulled him from the room, ignoring his protests. Both guards were under orders not to talk to the prisoner except to issue commands.

It was only a short walk down a corridor that was painted in the same sterile white, but Cornelius noted he had passed a half dozen doors labeled with names of prominent Ministry section heads. He was beginning to fear that the entire Ministry might be locked up somewhere in this hallway.

He was led into a room with a table, some chairs and a large mirror against one wall. Not knowing what else to do, he sat down at the table and waited to see what would happen.

About five minutes later, a tall man entered room carrying a leather briefcase. Cornelius didn't recognize him. The man was very distinguished looking, with gray hair at his temples. He was impeccably dressed in a muggle suit that had been hand tailored to fit. He sat and opened his briefcase, then he removed a file folder. He opened the folder and started to examine the papers for a moment.

"Cornelius Fudge, elected to the position of Minister of Magic in 1986 when former Minister Bagnold resigned. Before that, you were a Senior Undersecretary under Bagnold, having worked your way up the ranks, first through the Department of International Cooperation and then the Obliviation squad. Graduated from Hogwarts in 1964, you were a minor employee until your older brother was killed in a Death Eater attack in 1972 at which point you assumed control of the Fudge family."

The man turned a page. "It was rumored that you took numerous bribes during your term in office, but until recently it was never proven. You were apparently blackmailed for a while and your principle controller was Lucius Malfoy, a marked Death Eater and wanted criminal. According to our records, you received more than twenty bribes over the years from Malfoy."

Fudge stared at the man in astonishment. "Lucius was never wanted for anything!" he said in protest.

The man looked up from his papers. "Oh, come now, Mr. Fudge. Malfoy was wanted for questioning in the murders of a number of people by Her Majesty's government. In fact, there was a warrant issued for him in 1978. We even had a few photographs that were taken of him committing one of those murders. Luckily for us, he never recognized the teller's camera at the bank."

"Muggles can't arrest wizards!" Fudge snapped, "Just who the hell are you, anyway?"

The man smiled thinly. "I am Sir William O'Hearny and I have been appointed by Her Majesty, Queen Elizabeth the Second, to oversee

the Ministry of Magic during this transition period. I'll also oversee the trial of you and your fellow conspirators. Considering your actions at Balmoral Castle, we'll be adding murder to the list of charges."

"Transition? Trial?" echoed Fudge weakly.

"Quite so. By Her Majesty's command, the existing Ministry of Magic has been disbanded and all of its employees have been detained. Some, like yourself, will be tried for treason, some will be questioned and eventually released. In the meantime, I am supposed to help guide the Ministry as it becomes a sub division of the Home Office. In short, Her Majesty has revoked your autonomy for your repeated violations of the treaties between the Crown and you Wizards. Additionally, Her Majesty is most upset about the rampant bias and oppression of the other intelligent magical species.

"She feels your treatment of Dragons, House Elves and the Goblins, to name a few, is appalling and since you seem disinclined to do anything about it, she will."

"But they are beasts!" exclaimed Fudge.

O'Hearny looked at the man coldly. "You will, of course, have an opportunity to present your defense at your trial for treason, Mr. Fudge. Just be thankful that we're more civilized than your society. We outlawed capital punishment years ago. On the other hand, we intend to offer you the use of your truth serum. I would caution you not to refuse, since doing so would cast doubt on any testimony you might give."

He paused and ignored Fudge's sickly pallor. He examined a few more papers, then he pulled out a legal pad and a pen.

"Now that we've gotten the pleasantries out of the way, I have a few questions which we'd like answered," O'Hearny said.

Fudge slumped back in his chair in defeat. The muggles were in control and it looked like he had no way out of this!

Kitchen Hall, Campbeltown Weyr, June 27th...

"You're leaving us?"

Minerva looked up from her tea to see Harry standing on the other side of the table looking down at her.

She motioned for him to sit and waited until he was in his chair before answering him. "This was never meant to be a permanent move for me, Harry," she said gently. "With Albus helping the government, my job is even more important now."

She sighed and ruefully shook her head. "I suppose I am the Headmistress now. While I didn't mind being the Deputy, I much preferred teaching and didn't aspire to the position."

"We'll miss you around the Weyr," Harry admitted. He greatly respected his former head of house and he wished she didn't have to leave.

She smiled at him. "I want you to promise me that you'll try to keep up with your studies. You have a powerful gift, Harry, and I would hate to see it wasted."

"I'll do my best, Professor," he replied. "But there's so much to learn."

She nodded. "Yes, there is, and come the new school year, Hogwarts will need to broaden our own horizons, so you won't be alone in that regard. You have the ability, Harry. I've watched you and I know you are a lot smarter than you credit yourself to be."

Harry nodded with flaming cheeks. Minerva would never tell him directly, but she long suspected that he was smarter than he appeared to be, but thanks to his upbringing, he tried to hide it.

Harry also knew Hogwarts would be forced to update the courses to include material taught around the country. The students might be wizards, but they would also have to pass the standardized tests from here on.

"We'll miss you too, Professor Tabbycat," announced Chekiath brightly. He enjoyed her company and often found himself talking to her when Harry was busy with Weyr business. Most dragons called

her Harper, but Chekiath and a handful of other dragons thought of her as a personal friend and used a more familiar title than Harper.

Minerva blinked in surprise, then her smile broadened. "Thank you, Chekiath. Will you make sure to look after Harry for me? He's been quite a handful."

"That's because you have tiny hands. I don't have hands, but my paws are quite big. I'll always look after him. He is my rider," Chekiath replied confidently.

Minerva chuckled and shook her head. The literalness of the dragons always made her laugh.

"Professor," Harry said, "sometime in September I expect we'll stop by. Well, Luna and her search team will, at least. Hopefully by then the idea of being a Rider will be known to the British magical society. If you like, we could arrange for a day and help out in a Magical Creatures class while the dragons check for potential candidates."

Minerva nodded thoughtfully. "Yes, that might work. Tell Luna that I'll be expecting her to send an owl with the details of her visit." She had been briefed on the need to find new potential riders. The ones who had been taken last time were the most viable candidates, but there may be other potential riders at the school plus there would be the first years to check.

Harry nodded, then he stood. "You will always be welcome here, Professor."

Minerva nodded and looked away, unwilling to show one of her favorite students that her eyes were filled with tears.

CID Holding Cell, June 28th...

The door opened and the prisoner looked up, surprised. He hadn't really expected anyone would want to talk to him, so he was shocked to see Albus Dumbledore and a man he didn't know walk into the room.

"Arthur," Dumbledore said. "I am sorry that we inconvenienced you so. I only recently learned that you were being held."

"Mister Weasley?"

Arthur blinked and looked at the man who was dressed in a muggle suit.

"I'm sorry that you've been held under these conditions for so long, but Albus only learned of your capture this morning. He has convinced me that holding you would be counter productive. He spoke of you in glowing terms, calling you and the late Miss Bones two of the most honest and hard working department managers in the Ministry."

Arthur stared at the man for a moment, then he turned to Albus with a questioning expression.

Albus smiled. "I'm afraid, old friend, that we are in for some rough times ahead and we could really use your help. You see, the Ministry attacked the goblins using the WDF."

"They did? I thought that was all just rumors."

"They weren't rumors," said the man in the muggle suit. "They attacked and were wiped out to a man. Dozens of old, pureblood families have lost their heirs. In some cases, the families have ceased to exist entirely."

That was one fact that the British Wizarding World knew and was still unable to comprehend. Nearly eight hundred and fifty of the finest wizards and witches were dead. Wizarding Britain was in a state of shock and thoroughly cowed by the events of the past week. Everyone knew someone that had been killed, in some cases they knew more than one.

Arthur looked over at the man again and Dumbledore decided to jump in. "Arthur, allow me to introduce you to Sir William O'Hearn, the new Deputy Minister of Magic. Sir William answers directly to the Prime Minister and the Crown."

He paused and looked a bit embarrassed. "You see, Arthur, the muggles have been working with the goblins. Our Ministry was about to plunge our country into a civil war. So the muggles and the goblins combined forces to deal them. The old Ministry is gone. The Wizengamot is a thing of the past. The Queen has disbanded the

Wizengamot and is looking at revoking many noble titles. All the old laws have been put aside by royal decree. There's a new Ministry forming, with new laws, answerable to the Crown and the Prime Minister, and we could really use your help putting things back together."

Arthur looked between the two men and swallowed nervously. "Albus, you know I'm willing to help, but as much as I would like to pretend I know muggles, we both know I'm woefully ignorant of them."

"Well, Mister Weasley," O'Hearny said, "this is your chance to learn first hand from real people. Your people need you, sir, and so does your country. Will you help us?"

Arthur looked at O'Hearny for a long moment, then he nodded. "Can I at least tell my wife and family that I'm all right? Molly must be going insane by now."

O'Hearny smiled broadly. "You'll do better than that. In a few minutes, a guard will come in with your clothing. Get dressed and then let him take you down to one of our offices, where we'll take a photograph and fingerprint you for your Identification card. It'll take about an hour. During that time, you'll receive instructions on how to find the new entrance to the Ministry of Magic. Once that's done, you can go home to your wife and family. I am certain they are anxious to see you. Albus will contact you about returning to work and what we'll have you doing. In the meantime, take a day or two with your family."

O'Hearny stuck out his hand and Arthur glanced over to see Albus smiling encouragingly.

He reached out and took the offered hand. "Thank you, Minister," he said softly. He was greatly looking forward to going home. The last few days had been hellish on him and he was sure Molly was going insane and taking the kids along for the ride.

"I'll floo you tomorrow, Arthur," Albus said with a smile. The floo network was still down except for official use only.

The two men filed out of the room and a guard walked in with a neatly bound package containing his clothing.

"I'll be outside, sir. Get dressed and come out when you're ready,"
The guard said.

Arthur took the package with slightly trembling hands. "Thank you," he whispered. He couldn't believe it. He still had a job and he was going home!

Ministry of Magic, later that day, June 28th...

"Are you sure about this?" asked Croaker.

"Ambassador Zimmer told me so personally," replied Albus

"I suppose this was to be expected," O'Hearny offered. "We did take over the government. It's bound to make the other magical ministries nervous."

Germany's ambassador had informed Dumbledore that they were suspending diplomatic relations and he was being recalled for consultations. Zimmer admitted that his Ministry was more tightly bound to their government than the British had been and he personally expected to be back within a few days.

The world was watching the British nervously and there had been some calls for nations to use their own forces to come to the aid of the British wizards. Rumors abounded over how the WDF was destroyed and many nations wisely decided to step back and declare it to be an internal problem in Britain that they would stay out of.

"So far, eight nations have recalled their ambassadors for consultation. Others are taking a wait and see approach. Up until Zimmer spoke to me, I had considered using the list as a means to determine which government was being illegally controlled by the wizards but with France and Germany recalling their ambassadors I can't do that now. Zimmer assures me that his Minister answers to Chancellor Kohl directly."

"How does this affect us?" asked O'Hearny.

Dumbledore looked up from the paper he was reading. "Most international trade had been in chaos since Harry first impressed

Chekiath. We need time to rebuild it and time to explore other opportunities that aren't related to dragon based products. So essentially, the economy is stagnating, but you already knew that.

"On a obvious front, what will some of these countries do? I think that most will watch and wait. It's the few extremist pureblood countries that worry me. They may opt to do something rash."

"Strengthening our access points might be a smart thing to do, at least for now," offered Croaker.

O'Hearny looked confused. "Eh?"

"Inter-country travel via magic is restricted, just as you restrict normal travel. Warding has been set up in such a manner that you can only arrive at an approved access point. There, your wand signature is registered and your entry is recorded by the Ministry of that country. Then you're free to continue on to your final destination," Albus said.

"It is possible to break through the wards, but that in itself would trigger an alarm and the process of breaking through them would be so violent you'd probably find yourself throwing up long after the aurors to track you down," Croaker added with a nasty smirk.

O'Hearny frowned, "Gentlemen, that is find and dandy, but there are literally hundreds of harbors, airports, and even the chunnel to consider."

Croaker chuckled. "No wizard government would seriously consider a normal method unless they were truly desperate."

Albus nodded with a smile, then a thought occurred to him. "Sir, if I may enquire, what has happened with all those people saved by the dragons?"

Sir William smirked. "We confiscated and wiped every recording device we found and most agreed to keep our secret. The rare person who refused was remanded into custody at her Majesty's pleasure. We are reluctant to use your memory wiping spells, but Her Majesty had decreed that any person unwilling to abide by our security concerns will have their memory modified to match the public story of a terrorist attack."

Dumbledore and Croaker nodded, then turned back to their desks.

O'Hearny turned to his computer to write up a note for Lord Kennewick's group about this foreign issue. It wasn't exactly his area of expertise, but someone had to know of the potential problems out there.

CID Holding Cell, June 30th...

The door to the cell opened and Rita looked up in fear. She had been held here against her will for days and the only time anyone talked to her was early on to find out her name and why she was going to the Ministry that day. Since then, her meals had been delivered in silence, except for calls to pass out the used tray. For a reporter, day upon day of silence was a nerve racking affair.

A man walked in wearing a muggle suit. He was followed by the strangest looking Auror she had ever seen. The auror wore the usual red robes, but he had a badge clearly pinned to his chest. Around his waist he wore a belt that contained a holster for his wand, as well as what appeared to be a muggle firearm.

"Ms Skeeter, my name is Sir William O'Hearny and I'm the new Deputy Minister of magic," O'Hearny said.

Skeeter looked shocked. "What happened to Fudge?" she demanded to know.

"Mr. Fudge has been arrested on multiple counts of high treason and is currently awaiting trial at Her Majesty's pleasure. Most of the Ministry has also been detained while we sort out the charges against them.

"Her Majesty has commanded that the Ministry of Magic be reformed under the auspices of the Home Office. Most of its laws have been put aside for review. Those that don't conflict with government policy will be passed along to Her Majesty for reinstatement."

"Ms. Skeeter, normally you would be released, but considering your reputation, I thought I might be a little proactive here. Your boss has been told the guidelines under which he is allowed to publish his

paper, and he's been told that infractions of those guidelines will result in jail time for him and the reporters writing the articles in question. It is a new world out there, Ms. Skeeter and you will have to adapt to the fact that your reports will require more truth than hearsay."

Skeeter stared at the man in fear. He was a muggle and he was claiming that her world had been destroyed by muggles!

"What gives you the right to do this?" she asked in an uncharacteristically meek tone. She was seriously unnerved by the look of loathing she was getting from the man dressed as an auror. She didn't know him and she knew all of the aurors. To her mind, this was a sign that a lot more had changed than just the Ministry turn over.

"You are a British subject, madam. And because your government refused to deal with her Majesty's government, you fell behind the times far more than was allowable. The Queen has little civil authority in the world, but in yours, she is still the absolute monarch. When we learned of the crimes against the dragons, we also discovered the crimes your Ministry was routinely committing against us."

The auror coughed gently and Sir William took a deep breath. This woman reminded him of the worst of the reporters he had dealt with in the past and he really didn't want to deal with her any longer.

"Auror Johnson here will escort you to a nearby office where you will be given your personal effects and allowed to change back into your normal clothing. He will also provide you with a list of rules governing Animagi and what they can and cannot do. I strongly suggest you read the list thoroughly. Her Majesty's government takes a rather dim view of animagi and believes that anything that happens to you while in your other form is your own fault."

Skeeter paled several shades. This was a major change from the old rules, which said that animagi were still protected in their animal form.

Sir William started to turn, then he stopped and looked at her. "Your editor wasn't a happy man, but he seemed like an intelligent fellow. Personally, I hope he's smart enough to see the trouble you've

caused in the past and knows when to cut his losses. I have read some of your articles and nothing would give me more pleasure than to discover you no longer have a job, Ms. Skeeter."

Sir William turned and left the room, leaving her alone with Auror Johnson. "This way please," the man said flatly.

Numb and terrified, Rita Skeeter walked out into a whole new world.

Campbeltown Weyr, June 30th...

Harry sighed and opened his book to the first page. The last month had been a roller coaster of events and emotions and he felt drained by them. The Ministry of Magic was now under the firm control of Her Majesty's government and they had enough wizards working for them to ensure the wizards couldn't pull any tricks on them.

He was finally able to cross off item fifteen on his list. It was one of the first items that he had wrote down many months ago.

"Make Britain Safe for dragon kind," he said softly. "Check."

He made a check next to the entry. It had been the only entry which had been still open on that page. All of the others had been taken care of long ago.

"It's a start, Cheki," he said, then he flipped to the end of his list.

"It is a good start, Harry, and it wouldn't have happened without you."

"Entry six hundred and fourteen is to make the world safe for dragons?" he said, then he glanced over to Chekiath for his opinion.

"Maybe, but isn't that a lot to do with one line?" Chekiath asked.

Harry frowned. "It is a lot. How about we change it to something like 'make the world safe for dragons, one country at a time'?"

Chekiath turned his large head and his eyes whirled with green streaks, indicating his amusement. "That's a little more reasonable. And we won't be alone, you know. We'll have Maziang and Condron

to help us and there will be other Weyrs beyond them. We also have our friends here."

Harry nodded and scribbled the entry into his book. With that done, he closed it and leaned back in his chair. They had accomplished so much, but there was more still to do. Campbeltown Weyr was secure and welcome in Britain. Now he just had to sell that idea to the other nations of the world.

He stood and walked over to where Cheki lay. The large dragon was already curled up and he grabbed a sheet that he kept handy, then he nestled down between Cheki's front paws. Tomorrow, the Weyr would begin their around the world tour and he could use the break.

"Goodnight, Cheki." he mumbled, already beginning to doze.

Cheki rumbled softly and curled his long neck protectively around Harry. "Sleep well, Harry," he replied.

The first year of the Weyr and the decade that followed were some of the most hectic, nail biting and rewarding years of this author's life. Never has so much changed in such a short a span of time. The rise of the Weyrs reshaped the world and the future of humanity, and it all started with a boy named Harry and Cheki, his dragon.

Excerpted from The Weyrs of Earth by Remus John Lupin, published 2040.

Author's Notes and Mockeries:

- As I write this final notes and mockeries, I find myself hampered by a lack of internet connection. Living in the wilds of North Idaho where Spring time is a weird mix of blizzards, freezing rains and warm sunny days, the power has been interrupted at the microwave relay station a few miles north of here, leaving us without net. I have exactly one page of reviews up in my browser and can't look at any others so this is going to be a tame set of notes.

- Several correctly pointed out that keeping dragons secret is going to be very difficult. That is very true, but there are already plans in the works to releasing the news about them to the public, and most likely sometime around the turn of the year they will become public knowledge. The government only needs to keep them secret for six

to eight months longer. Unfortunately you won't see that part until Book two.

- Here you go, a whole book full of story and Harry still hasn't gotten laid. What's worse is his relationship with Hermione is at best very wishy washy. Again, I never intended that you'd see a resolution to this sad teen romance in this book. Book two folks, and it's going to be a roller coaster.

- Let me state this as succinctly as possible. THERE WILL BE NO MORE CANON CHARACTERS TAKEN TO THE WEYR. No Weasleys, no Neville. We will see canon characters from time to time, but none of them will be moved to the Weyr.

- Future Weyrs. Let me state right now that we'll see plenty of them. Some will make the transition from former Dragon Reserve to real Weyr and some won't. Unlike Pern which only had a handful of Weyrs, there are a lot of them on Earth, so we're only going to see a few main ones and the rest will be in passing. Please don't request Weyrs in your home country/state/island etc.

- The Dementor issue is just raising its ugly head and will have to be dealt with.

- And so we come to the end of the first part of this tale. When we first started it, it wasn't clear the scope of the tale and it was only when we were well into the story that we realized it would span several books at least. Alyx and I hope you enjoyed this part and hope you'll come back to read "On the Wings of Dragons".

If you're curious as to what it's about, the very last section of this chapter gave you a VERY big clue.